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Balzac
The village curé

CENTRAL

Honoré de Balzac

LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE

The Human Comedy

COUNTRY LIFE

VOLUME II

Dan'l Hernandez

PUBLIC CONFESSION OF MADAME GRASLIN

The dying woman appeared, * * * * * *She knelt upon a cushion, clasped her hands, and was silent for a few moments, as if collecting strength to speak from some spring supplied by Heaven. At that moment there was something indefinably terrifying in the silence.*

The *Edition Définitive* of the *Comédie Humaine* by HONORÉ DE BALZAC, now for the first time completely translated into English.

C S

THE VILLAGE CURÉ. IN ONE VOLUME. TRANSLATED BY GEORGE BURNHAM IVES, AND ILLUSTRATED WITH FOUR ETCHINGS.

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THE VILLAGE CURÉ

I

VÉRONIQUE

In Lower Limoges, at the corner of Rue de la Vieille-Poste and Rue de la Cité, there stood, thirty years ago, one of those shops in which nothing seems to have been changed since the Middle Ages. Huge flagstones, broken in a thousand places, laid upon the ground which showed damp in spots, would have caused the fall of anybody who had failed to notice the depressions and elevations of that strange flooring. The dusty walls exhibited a curious mixture of wood and brick, stone and iron, thrown together with a solidity due to age, perhaps to chance. For more than a hundred years, the ceiling, consisting of enormous timbers, had bent without breaking beneath the weight of the upper floors. Those floors, built *en colombage*, were covered on the outside with slates nailed in such way as to represent geometrical figures, and presented an ingenuous type of the bourgeois structures of the olden time. Of the windows, set in wooden frames and once embellished with carvings, long since destroyed by the vagaries of the weather, not one was perpendicular; some bulged out, others retreated, others seemed to

be falling apart; all of them had in their yawning cracks dirt brought thither by the rain, Heaven knows how, and in the spring a few sickly flowers grew there, shrinking plants and slender grasses. The roof and window-sills were velvety with moss. The pillar at the corner, although built of composite masonry, that is to say, of bricks mixed with stones and flint, alarmed one by its curvature: it seemed that it must give way some day under the weight of the house, the gable of which overhung about six inches. So that the municipal authorities, the departments of streets and buildings, purchased the building and pulled it down, in order to enlarge the square. This pillar, situated at the junction of the two streets, commended itself to persons interested in the antiquities of Limoges by reason of a pretty little carved niche, in which stood a Virgin, mutilated during the Revolution. Bourgeois with archæological leanings discovered traces of the stone ledge intended to hold the candelabra in which the public piety placed its lighted tapers, its votive offerings and flowers.

At the rear of the shop there was a decayed wooden staircase leading to the two upper floors and the garret above them. The house, which adjoined the houses on each side, had no depth, and received no light except through the windows. Each floor contained only two small rooms, lighted each by one window, which in one case looked on Rue de la Cité and in the other on Rue de la Vieille-Poste. In the Middle Ages no mechanic had a more comfortable

dwelling than that. It had evidently once belonged to smiths, armorers, cutlers, to some masters whose occupation did not dislike the open air; it was impossible to see there, unless the iron-bound shutters were removed from both fronts, there being a door on each side of the pillar, as in many shops located at the corner of two streets. At each door, just inside the fine stone threshold, worn smooth by centuries, began a low wall, breast-high, on top of which was a groove, corresponding to a groove in the timber above, upon which the upper walls rested. From time immemorial, there had been heavy shutters to slide in those grooves; they were fastened, when closed, by enormous bands of iron bolted on; and, when the doors were closed and secured by similar means, the house was transformed into a fortress. Upon examining the interior, which, during the first twenty years of this century, the people of Limoges were accustomed to see filled with old iron, copper, springs, wheel-tires, bells, and metal of all sorts from demolished buildings, those persons who were interested in this relic of the old city noticed the location of a forge flue, indicated by a long streak of soot, a detail which confirmed the conjectures of antiquarians as to the original destination of the shop. On the first floor were a bedroom and the kitchen; the second had two bedrooms; the garret was used as a store-room for more delicate objects than those tossed pell-mell about the shop.

This house was at first rented, then sold to one Sauviat, a travelling peddler, who, from 1792 to

1796, covered the country within a radius of fifty leagues about Auvergne, exchanging pottery, platters, plates, glasses, in a word, household articles required by the poorest families, for old iron, copper, lead, metal of any sort, whatever disguise it might have assumed. The Auvergnat gave an earthenware saucepan worth two sous for a pound of lead, or for two pounds of iron, a broken spade, a broken hoe, or an old cracked kettle; and, being always the judge in his own cause, he weighed his junk himself. After the third year, Sauviat added the trade of coppersmith to his other trade. In 1793 he was able to purchase a château sold as national property, and pulled it to pieces; the profit he made by that transaction he duplicated doubtless at several points in his sphere of operations; later, these first essays suggested to him the idea of proposing to one of his fellow-provincials in Paris a similar business on a grand scale. Thus, the Black Band, so famous by reason of its demolitions, originated in the brain of old Sauviat the peddler, whom all Limoges saw for twenty-seven years in that poor shop, among his cracked bells, his balances, his chains, his iron rods, his twisted leaden gutters, his old metal of all sorts; we must do him the justice to say that he never knew of the celebrity or the extensive operations of that association; he profited by it only in proportion to the funds entrusted by him to the famous house of Brézac.

Tired of travelling about from fair to fair and village to village, the Auvergnat settled down in

Limoges, where, in 1797, he married the daughter of a widowed coppersmith named Champagnac. When his father-in-law died, he bought the house in which he had established himself permanently as a dealer in junk, after carrying on the trade for three years longer in the country, in company with his wife. Sauviat was approaching his fiftieth year when he married old Champagnac's daughter, who was not less than thirty. Although she was not beautiful, nor even pretty, La Champagnac was born in Auvergne, and the patois was a mutual attraction; then, too, she had the stout frame that enables women to endure the severest toil, and she accompanied Sauviat in his wanderings. She carried iron or lead on her back, and drew the wretched cart full of pottery with which her husband plied his disguised usury. Of dark, swarthy complexion, in perfect health, La Champagnac showed, when she laughed, white teeth as broad and long as almonds; she had, too, the bust and hips of those women whom nature has formed for mothers. The failure of that stout, healthy creature to be married earlier in life must be attributed to the *No dowry!* of Harpagon, which her father practised, although he had never read Molière. Sauviat did not take fright at the *No dowry;* a man of fifty was not likely to raise questions of that sort, and then, his wife would save him the expense of a servant. He made no addition to the furniture of his bedroom, where, from the day of his wedding to the day he moved out, there was never anything more than a four-poster

bed with a fluted valance and curtains of green serge, a chest, a commode, four armchairs, a table, and a mirror, all brought from different localities. The upper part of the chest contained a service of pewter-plate of which no two pieces were alike. Everyone can imagine the aspect of the kitchen which adjoined the bedroom.

Neither husband nor wife knew how to read, a trifling defect in their education, which did not prevent their being wonderfully clever at figures, and carrying on the most flourishing trade imaginable. Sauviat purchased nothing which he was not certain of being able to dispose of at a profit of a hundred per cent. To obviate the necessity of keeping books and an office, he bought and sold exclusively for cash. He had, moreover, such an accurate memory that, if an object remained in his shop five years, he, and his wife too, could give you, almost to a sou, the price he paid for it, with interest added each year. Except while she was attending to her housekeeping duties, La Sauviat was always seated on a rickety wooden chair with her back against the corner pillar; there she would sit and knit, watching the passers-by, keeping an eye on her old junk, selling it, weighing it, and delivering it herself, if Sauviat were away upon a purchasing trip. At dawn the junk-dealer would be heard working at his shutters; the dog would run into the street, and soon La Sauviat would appear and assist her man to place upon the natural shelves formed by the low walls in

Rue de la Vieille-Poste and Rue de la Cité, bells large and small, old springs, broken gun-barrels, the small trash of their trade, which served as a sign and gave a paltry aspect enough to that shop in which there frequently was twenty thousand francs' worth of lead, steel, and bell-metal.

The quondam peddler and his wife never spoke of their wealth; they concealed it as a malefactor conceals a crime; they were long suspected of clipping louis d'or and silver crowns. When Champagnac died, the Sauviats returned no inventory; they searched, with the cunning of rats, every corner of his house, left it as bare as a corpse, and sold the coppersmith's stock in their own shop. Once a year, in December, Sauviat went to Paris, always by the public conveyance. So that his inquisitive neighbors concluded that the junk-dealer made his own investments in Paris, in order to conceal the amount of his fortune. It was known later that, by the advice of one of the most eminent dealers in metals, an Auvergnat like himself, with whom he had been very intimate in his youth, he placed his funds advantageously with the house of Brézac, the corner-stone of that famous association known as the Black Band, which was formed, as we have said, at Sauviat's suggestion, and of which he was one of the founders.

Sauviat was a short, fat man, with a careworn face, endowed by nature with an honest expression which charmed the customer, and which was of great assistance to him in selling his wares

to advantage. The lack of warmth in his assertions, and the utter indifference of his bearing, materially assisted his pretensions. His ruddy complexion could hardly be distinguished beneath the black metallic dust with which his pock-marked face and his curly hair were covered. His forehead did not lack distinction, it resembled the classic forehead imputed by all painters to Saint Peter, the least refined, the most plebeian, and also the shrewdest of the apostles. His hands were those of the untiring worker, large and thick and square-fingered, and seamed by deep cracks. His chest was a solid mass of muscle. He never laid aside his peddler's costume: heavy hobnailed shoes, blue stockings, knitted by his wife, and concealed beneath leather gaiters; bottle-green velvet breeches, plaid waistcoat, from which depended the copper key of his silver watch attached to an iron chain, which use made as shiny and polished as steel, a jacket with short skirts made of velvet like that of the breeches, and around his neck a necktie of figured cotton, frayed by the rubbing of his beard. On Sundays and holidays Sauviat wore a frock-coat of wine-colored cloth, so well cared for that he purchased a new one only twice in twenty years.

The life of a galley-slave may be considered luxurious compared with that of the Sauviats; they ate meat only on church festival days. Before giving up the money necessary for their daily subsistence, La Sauviat would fumble in the two pockets hidden between her skirt and her petticoat, and she

never produced aught but worn, clipped coins, crowns of six francs or of fifty sous, which she gazed at despairingly before changing one of them. Most of the time the Sauviats contented themselves with herring, red peas, cheese, hard-boiled eggs mixed with lettuce, and vegetables cooked in the least expensive way. They never laid in a supply of anything, except a few bunches of garlic or onions, which nothing could spoil and which cost almost nothing. The little wood which they used in winter La Sauviat bought from the itinerant dealers who passed the door, a day's supply at once. At seven o'clock in the winter, at nine in summer, the household was in bed, the shop closed, and guarded by a huge dog, who stole his living in the kitchens of the neighborhood. Mère Sauviat did not spend three francs for candles in a year.

The sober, toilsome life of these people was enlivened by a single joy, a joy that came to them in due course of nature, and for which they were guilty of their only known extravagance.

In May, 1802, La Sauviat had a daughter. She brought the child into the world unaided, and attended to her household duties five days later. She nursed the child, sitting in her chair, in the open air, and selling old iron with the little one at her breast. As her milk cost nothing, the child was not weaned for two years, and was the better for it. Véronique became the loveliest child in all the lower town, the passers-by stopped to look at her. Thereupon the neighbors began to detect some traces of natural

feeling in old Sauviat, whom they had supposed to be entirely devoid of anything of the sort. While his wife was preparing dinner, the junk-dealer would hold the little one in his arms, and rock it, singing snatches of Auvergnat ditties. Sometimes the workmen noticed him standing perfectly motionless, gazing at Véronique, asleep on her mother's lap. For his daughter he softened his harsh voice, and he wiped his hands on his breeches before taking her. When Véronique tried to walk, her father would stoop and station himself four or five steps away from her, holding out his hands and making grimaces that imparted a joyous expression to the deep, metallic folds of his stern and forbidding features. That man of lead and iron and copper became a man of flesh and blood and bones once more. If he were sitting with his back against his pillar, motionless as a statue, a cry from Véronique would make him start; he would rush through the heaps of old iron to find her, for she passed her childhood playing with the débris of demolished châteaux piled in the dark recesses of that vast shop, without ever injuring herself; she also went out to play in the street or at the neighbors' houses, but her mother never lost sight of her.

It may be as well to state that the Sauviats were eminently religious. When the Revolution was at its height, Sauviat observed Sundays and festivals. On two occasions he nearly lost his head for going to hear mass said by a priest who had not taken the oath. At last he was imprisoned, justly accused of

forwarding the flight of a bishop whose life he had saved. Luckily, the travelling junk-dealer knew all about files and iron bars, so that he was able to escape; but he was condemned to death by default, and, we may say parenthetically, he never appeared to purge himself of the default, but died in his bed. His wife shared his pious sentiments. The family avarice yielded only to the voice of religion. The old junk-dealers provided the consecrated bread with scrupulous exactness, and contributed to the offertory. If the vicar of Saint-Etienne came to them to ask alms, Sauviat or his wife would go at once, without discussion or wry faces, to fetch what they considered their proper contribution for the poor of the parish. The mutilated Virgin on their pillar was always, after 1799, decorated with box at Easter. In the flower season, those who passed the shop would see her decked with fresh nosegays, in blue-glass vessels, especially after Véronique was born. On the days of religious processions, the Sauviats were careful to have their house draped with black cloth and flowers, and they contributed to the erection and decoration of the street altar, the pride of their corner.

Véronique Sauviat therefore received the education of a Christian. From the age of seven she had for her teacher an Auvergnat Gray Nun, to whom the Sauviats had rendered some trifling services. Both of them, being very ready to oblige so long as nothing but their personal efforts or their time was concerned, were excellent neighbors, after

the manner of poor people, who generally give their services with much warmth. The Gray Nun taught Véronique to read and write, she instructed her in the history of God's people, the catechism, the Old and New Testament, and the rudiments of arithmetic. That was all; the sister thought that it would be enough, but it was too much.

At nine years of age, Véronique's beauty was a source of amazement throughout the quarter. Everyone admired a face which might some day be a worthy subject for the brush of painters who were most earnest in their quest of ideal beauty. She was nicknamed the *Little Virgin*, and she promised to be well-made and fair. Her madonna-like face—for the popular voice had well named her—was complemented by an abundance of fine light hair, which set off the purity of her features. Whoever has seen Titian's sublime little Virgin in his great picture of the *Presentation at the Temple*, will understand what Véronique was in her childhood: the same artless innocence, the same seraphic astonishment in her eyes, the same noble yet simple manner, the same infantile carriage. At the age of eleven she had the small-pox, and owed her life solely to the care of Sister Marthe. During the two months that their child was in danger, the Sauviats allowed the whole quarter to judge of the depth of their affection for her. Sauviat ceased to attend sales, he passed all his time in the shop, going up to his daughter's room and down again every moment, and sitting up with her all night, in company with

his wife. His silent grief seemed so intense that no one dared speak to him; the neighbors gazed compassionately at him, but confined their inquiries for news to Sister Marthe. During the days when the disease was at its height, the passers-by and the neighbors saw, for the first and only time in Sauviat's life, tears glistening for a long time between his eyelids and rolling down his hollow cheeks. He did not wipe them away, he would sit for hours like one dazed, afraid to go up to his daughter's room, looking without seeing; he could easily have been robbed! Véronique was saved, but her beauty died. That face, with its smooth, harmoniously blended brown and red complexion, was marked with innumerable pits, which roughened the skin, playing havoc with its fair, smooth surface. The brow could not escape the ravages of the scourge, it became discolored, and looked as if it had been dented with a hammer. Nothing can be more discordant than that brick-red skin against fair hair, it puts an end to pre-existing harmony. Those deep, capricious ruptures of the tissue marred the purity of the profile, the delicate outline of the face, of the nose, whose Grecian shape could hardly be distinguished, and of the chin, once as delicate as the rim of a porcelain vase. The disease respected only what it could not reach, the eyes and the teeth. Nor did Véronique lose her bodily grace and beauty, the rounded fulness of her outlines, or the fine shape of her waist. She was, at fifteen, a comely young woman, and—a consideration that comforted the Sauviats for the loss of her loveliness—

a devout, virtuous girl, active, hard-working, and domestic in her tastes.

During her convalescence and after her first communion, her father and mother gave her the two rooms on the second floor for her private apartments. At that period, Sauviat, harsh as he was to himself and his wife, began to form some suspicions of comfortable living; he conceived a vague idea of consoling his daughter for a loss of which she as yet knew nothing. The passing of the beauty that was the pride of those two creatures made Véronique even dearer and more precious to them. One day Sauviat brought home a second-hand carpet on his back, and nailed it on Véronique's floor with his own hand. He laid aside for her, at the sale of a château, a great lady's red damask bed, and the curtains, armchairs, and common chairs covered with the same material. He furnished the two rooms occupied by his daughter with old articles of furniture of whose value she had no idea. He placed jars of mignonette on her window-sill, and brought back with him from his trips sometimes rose-bushes, sometimes pinks, flowers of all sorts, given him in all probability by gardeners or innkeepers. If Véronique had been able to make comparisons, and had realized the characters, the manners, the ignorance of her parents, she would have understood how much affection there was in these trivial incidents; but she loved them with charming naturalness and without reflection. Véronique had the finest linen that her mother could find

at the drapers'. La Sauviat gave her daughter permission to buy whatever materials she desired for her dresses. Both father and mother were delighted by the modesty of their daughter, who had no extravagant tastes. Véronique contented herself with a blue silk dress for fête-days, and wore, on working-days, a coarse merino in winter and a striped calico in summer. On Sundays she attended divine service with her father and mother, and after vespers walked along the Vienne or in the suburbs. On ordinary days she remained in her room, occupied with tapestry, the price of which belonged to the poor; thus it will be seen that her manners were of the simplest, the most chaste, and most exemplary. Sometimes she made linen for the hospital. She interspersed her work with reading, and read only such books as were lent her by the vicar of Saint-Etienne, a priest who had been introduced to the Sauviats by Sister Marthe.

So far as Véronique was concerned, the laws of domestic economy were entirely suspended. Her mother took delight in serving her with choice food, and cooked for her separately. The father and mother continued to eat their nuts, their dry bread, their herrings, their fricasseed peas with salted butter, whereas nothing was fresh enough or good enough for Véronique.

"Véronique must cost you a great deal," said a hatmaker one day, whose shop was opposite the Sauviats, and who had designs upon Véronique in his son's behalf, estimating the old junk-dealer's fortune at a hundred thousand francs.

"Yes, neighbor, yes, neighbor, yes!" replied old Sauviat; "if she was to ask me for ten crowns, I'd give 'em to her all the same. She has all she wants, but she never asks for anything. She's as gentle as a lamb!"

In fact, Véronique had no idea of the price of anything; she had never needed anything; she never saw any gold pieces until the day of her wedding, she never had a purse of her own; her mother bought and gave her everything she wanted, so that she felt in her mother's pocket for alms for a beggar.

"Then she don't cost you much," said the hatmaker.

"You think so, do you?" replied Sauviat. "You wouldn't get out of it whole at forty crowns a year. And her room! why, she has a good hundred crowns in furniture in her room; but when a man has only one daughter, he can afford to let himself out. After all, the little we own will all be hers."

"Little? You must be a rich man, Père Sauviat. For forty years you've been carrying on a trade in which there's no losses."

"Oh! no one would hit me hard for twelve hundred francs," retorted the old junk-dealer.

From the day that Véronique lost the placid beauty that won public admiration for her face as a young girl, Père Sauviat redoubled his activity. His trade increased so rapidly, that he made several trips to Paris each year thereafter. Everyone understood that it was his purpose to make up in money for

what he called, in the language of the trade, the waste caused by his daughter. When Véronique was fifteen years old, a change took place in the domestic habits of the family. The father and mother went up every evening to their daughter's rooms, and she read to them, by the light of the lamp placed behind a glass globe filled with water, the *Lives of the Saints*, *Edifying Letters*,—in fact, all the books lent her by the vicar. La Sauviat knitted, thinking that in that way she earned the price of the oil. The neighbors could see from their houses the two old people sitting bolt upright in their chairs, like two Chinese figures, listening to their daughter and admiring her with all the strength of intellects that were obtuse to everything that was not business or religious faith. Doubtless there have been in the world girls as pure as Véronique, but never was there a purer or more modest one. Her confession must have astounded the angels and rejoiced the heart of the Blessed Virgin. At sixteen she was fully developed and showed what she was to be. She was of medium height, neither her father nor mother being tall; but her figure was noticeable for its lithe grace, for those attractive sinuous outlines which painters strive so laboriously to reproduce and which nature draws with such delicacy of touch, their graceful contours being always visible to the eye of the connoisseur, despite the linen and the thickness of the outer garments, which always adapt themselves and shape themselves to the nude figure, whatever one may do. Genuine, simple, natural,

Véronique displayed her beauty to the utmost advantage by movements entirely free from affectation. It had its full force and effect, if we may be allowed to borrow that emphatic expression from the technical language of the law. She had the well-rounded arms of the women of Auvergne, the plump, red hand of a comely tavern girl, large feet, but well-shaped and in proportion to her form. A phenomenon was manifested in her, a fascinating, wonderful phenomenon, which revealed to loving eyes a woman who was hidden from all others' sight. That phenomenon may have been one of the causes of the admiration manifested by her father and mother for her beauty, which they called divine, to the vast amazement of the neighbors. The first persons who noticed it were the priests at the cathedral and the faithful who partook of the sacrament. When any violent emotion made itself manifest in Véronique,—and the religious exaltation that overcame her when she partook of communion was certain to be among the most intense emotions of so pure-minded a girl,—it seemed that the rays of an internal light effaced the marks of the small-pox. The pure and radiant face of her childhood reappeared in its primitive loveliness. Although slightly veiled by the rough surface spread over it by the disease, it shone as a flower shines mysteriously beneath the water of the sea, when the rays of the sun penetrate it. For a few moments Véronique was changed: the Little Virgin appeared and disappeared like a celestial apparition. The pupils of

her eyes, which were capable of contraction to an extraordinary degree, seemed at such times to expand and pressed back the blue of the iris, which then formed a very slight circle. This metamorphosis of the eye, which became as keen and bright as the eagle's, completed the singular change in her face. Was it the tempest of restrained passions, was it a force from the depths of the soul which expanded the pupil in broad daylight, as with most people it expands in the darkness, thus shading with brown the azure hue of those heavenly eyes? Whatever it may have been, it was impossible to gaze unmoved upon Véronique when she returned from the altar to her place after being made one with God, and showed herself to the congregation in her former resplendent loveliness. At such times her beauty would have outshone that of the most beautiful women. What fascination to an enamored and jealous man in that veil of flesh which would hide the wife from all eyes, a veil which the hand of love would raise and let fall again upon legitimate joys! Véronique had a pair of lips, beautifully curved, which seemed to have been painted a bright vermilion, the pure, warm blood so abounded in them. Her chin and the lower part of her face were a little heavy, using the word in the acceptation given it by painters, and that heaviness is, according to the inexorable laws of physiognomy, an indication of a quasi-morbid intensity of passion. Above her well-modelled but almost imperious brow was a superb diadem of luxuriant hair, which had become a rich chestnut in color.

From her sixteenth birthday to the day of her marriage, Véronique's bearing was constantly pensive and melancholy. In such profound solitude she was certain to examine, as hermits do, the great spectacle of what was taking place within herself: the progress of her thoughts, the variety of the images presented to her mind, and the upward flight of emotions kindled by a pure life. Those persons who raised their eyes, as they passed through Rue de la Cité on a fine day, could see Sauviat's daughter sitting at her window, sewing, embroidering, or holding the needle over her canvas with a dreamy air. Her head stood out sharply among the flowers which gave a touch of poetry to the weather-beaten, cracked sill of her windows, with their panes set in a network of lead. Sometimes the reflection of the red damask curtains added to the effect of that face, already so richly colored; like a dark-hued flower, she reigned over the aërial garden so sedulously cared for by her upon her window-sill.

Thus that simple old house contained something even more simple than itself: a portrait of a young girl worthy of Mieris, Van Ostade, Terburg, or Gerard Dow, framed in one of those old tumble-down windows, defaced and dark with age, which appealed so strongly to their brushes. When a stranger, surprised at the appearance of the building, stood gazing up in open-mouthed amazement at the second floor, old Sauviat would protrude his head until it was outside the line of the overhang, sure of finding his daughter at her window. Then the

junk-dealer would draw in his head, and say to his wife, in the Auvergnat patois, rubbing his hands gleefully:

"I say, old lady, he's admiring your daughter!"

In 1820, there occurred in Véronique's simple and uneventful life an incident which would have been of no consequence in the case of any other young woman, but which may, perhaps, have exercised a deplorable influence upon her future. On the day of a former church festival, which had been suppressed, a day which was a working-day for the whole city, but on which the Sauviats closed their shop, attended church, and went to walk, Véronique, on her way to the open country, passed a book-stall in which she saw the story of *Paul et Virginie*. The whim seized her to purchase it, on account of the illustrations; her father paid a hundred sous for the fatal volume, and placed it in the capacious pocket of his Sunday coat.

"Hadn't you better show it to monsieur le vicaire?" said her mother, to whom every printed book always had a slight flavor of magic.

"I was thinking of it!" replied Véronique, simply.

The child passed the night reading that romance, one of the most touching books in the French language. The description of that mutual passion, semi-biblical, and worthy of the early ages of the world, wrought havoc in Véronique's heart. A hand, should we call it divine or diabolic, removed the veil which had thus far concealed nature from her. The Little Virgin buried in the lovely

maiden found her flowers lovelier the next morning than they were the day before, she understood their symbolic language, she scrutinized the blue vault of heaven with a fixed gaze overflowing with mental exultation, and tears gathered in her eyes without cause. In the lives of all women there comes a moment when they realize their destiny, when their temperament, hitherto mute, speaks in a tone of authority; it is not always a man selected by an involuntary, stealthy glance who awakens their slumbering sixth sense, but more frequently, perhaps, an unexpected spectacle, a lovely view, a book, the sight of a gorgeous religious ceremony, a blending of natural perfumes, a beautiful morning with its veil of delicate vapor, a strain of divine music with notes that caress the ear, in a word, some unforeseen cause of emotion in the mind or in the body. To that solitary girl, confined in that gloomy house, reared by simple-minded, quasi-rustic parents, a girl who had never heard an improper word, whose innocent mind had never been approached by the slightest evil thought; to the angelic pupil of Sister Marthe and the good vicar of Saint-Etienne, the revelation of love, which is woman's life, was made by a lovely book, by the hand of genius. To any other, the reading would have been free from danger; to her, that book was worse than an obscene book. Corruption is a relative term. There are sublime, virgin natures which are corrupted by a single thought; it causes the more damage because the necessity of resistance is not anticipated.

The next day Véronique showed the book to the good priest, who approved the purchase, *Paul et Virginie* being reputed to be so childlike, so innocent and pure. But the heat of the tropics and the beauty of the landscape, the almost childlike innocence of an almost holy love, had had their effect upon Véronique. She was led on by the sweet and noble face of the author to the worship of the ideal, that fatal human religion! She dreamed of having for her lover a young man like Paul. Her thoughts dwelt upon voluptuous pictures in an island filled with sweet fragrance. In her childish fancy she called an island in the Vienne, below Limoges, almost opposite Faubourg Saint-Martial, Ile de France. There her mind dwelt on the imaginary world which all girls create for themselves, and which they enrich with their own charms. She sat long hours at her window, watching the mechanics pass, the only class of men of whom she was allowed to think, in view of her parents' modest station. Accustomed, doubtless, to the idea of marrying a man of the people, she discovered in herself instincts which repelled anything in the nature of vulgarity. In that situation, she could not fail to amuse herself by composing some of those romances which all girls compose for themselves alone. She embraced, perhaps with the ardor natural to a refined and virgin imagination, the laudable idea of ennobling one of those men, of raising him to the height to which she was raised by her dreams: it may be that she made a Paul of some young man selected

by her glances, simply that she might fasten her wild ideas upon a human being, as the vapors of the damp atmosphere, when seized upon by the frost, crystallize on the branches by the roadside. She was likely to plunge into some deep abyss, for, although she often seemed to be returning to earth from a great height, with a luminous reflection upon her brow, yet oftener she seemed to hold in her hand flowers plucked on the bank of some mountain stream which she had followed to the foot of a precipice. On warm evenings she asked her old father for his arm and never failed to walk along the banks of the Vienne, where she would go into ecstasies over the beauties of the country and the sky, over the magnificent ruddy hues of the setting sun, over the dainty beauties of the dewy morning. Her mind exhaled the perfume of natural poesy. Her hair, which she formerly braided and twisted simply on top of her head, she brushed and curled with care. Her toilet denoted some thought. The vine, which grew wild, and had thrown itself naturally into the arms of the old elm, was transplanted, trimmed, and trained over a neat green trellis.

On returning from a trip to Paris, in December, 1822, old Sauviat, then seventy years of age, received a visit from the vicar, who said to him, after divers unimportant remarks:

"Sauviat, think about finding a husband for your daughter! At your age, you should not longer postpone the performance of an important duty."

"But does Véronique want to marry?" exclaimed the amazed old man.

"As you please, father," she replied, lowering her eyes.

"We will marry her," cried old Mère Sauviat, with a smile.

"Why didn't you say something about it before I went away, mother?" rejoined Sauviat. "I shall have to go back to Paris."

Jean-Baptiste Sauviat, like a man in whose eyes fortune seemed to constitute the whole of happiness, who had never seen aught but need in love, and in marriage aught but a method of transmitting one's property to another self, had sworn to marry Véronique to a rich bourgeois. That idea had long since assumed the shape of a fixed purpose in his brain. His neighbor, the hatmaker, who had an income of two thousand francs, had already solicited for his son, to whom he agreed to make over his establishment, the hand of a maiden so renowned as Véronique was throughout the neighborhood, by reason of her exemplary behavior and her Christian morals. Sauviat had politely refused, without mentioning the subject to Véronique. On the day following that on which the vicar, an important personage in the eyes of the Sauviat household, had spoken of the necessity of marrying Véronique, whose spiritual director he was, the old man shaved and dressed himself as if for a holiday, and went out without saying a word to his daughter or his wife. Both understood that the father had

gone in search of a son-in-law. Old Sauviat called upon his friend Graslin.

Monsieur Graslin, a wealthy banker of Limoges, was, like Sauviat, a man who had started out from Auvergne without a sou, had risen to the dignity of messenger, and, obtaining employment as office-boy in a banking establishment, had, like many financiers, made his way by strict economy and fortunate combinations. A cashier at the age of twenty-five, and for ten years thereafter a partner in the house of Perret and Grossetête, he had at last become the head of the establishment after purchasing the interest of those old bankers, both of whom had retired and gone into the country, leaving their funds in his hands in consideration of a small amount of interest. Pierre Graslin, who was forty-seven years of age at the time of which we write, was reputed to be worth at least six hundred thousand francs. Common rumor in the province had recently added to the amount of his fortune: one and all had applauded his generosity, which consisted in building for himself in the new quarter of Place des Arbres, a quarter destined to add to the external attractions of Limoges, a fine house on the line of the square, its façade conforming to that of a public building. Pierre Graslin hesitated about furnishing that house, which had been finished six months; it cost him so much that he postponed the moment of taking up his habitation in it. Possibly his pride had carried him beyond the laws of prudence which had governed

his life hitherto. With the good sense of the man of business, he realized that the interior of his house should be in harmony with the style of its façade. The furniture, the silver plate, and the necessary accessories of the life he would lead in his new mansion would, according to his reckoning, cost as much as the building itself. Despite the remarks of the town, and the jests of the business world, despite the charitable conjectures of his neighbor, he remained mewed up in the old, damp, and dirty ground-floor in Rue Montantmanigne, where his fortune had been made. The public chattered, but Graslin had the approval of his two old silent partners, who praised him for his unusual firmness. A great fortune and an existence like Graslin's were certain to arouse the envy of many persons in a provincial town. So that more than one project of marriage had been hinted at to Monsieur Graslin within ten years. But the condition of bachelor was so well suited to a man who was busy from morning to night, constantly fatigued by travel, overburdened with work, and as ardent in the pursuit of business as ever hunter was in pursuit of game, that Graslin fell into none of the traps set by ambitious mothers, who coveted that brilliant position for their daughters.

Graslin, a Sauviat in a higher sphere, did not spend forty sous a day, and went about dressed like an under-clerk. Two clerks and an office-boy were all he required in the conduct of his business, which was immense in its multiplicity of details. One

clerk attended to the correspondence, another acted as cashier. But Pierre Graslin was the mind and the body of the business. His clerks, taken from his own family, were reliable, intelligent men, inured to work, like himself. As for the office-boy, he led the life of a cart-horse. Graslin rose at five o'clock, the year round, and never retired until eleven. He hired a woman, an old Auvergnat, by the day, to do his cooking. The brown earthenware dishes, the strong, coarse household linen, were in harmony with the general character of the household. The Auvergnat had orders never to expend more than three francs for the total daily expenses of housekeeping. The boy-of-all-work acted as man-servant. The clerks did their own chamber-work. The blackened tables, the dilapidated straw-seated chairs, the pigeon-holes, the wretched wooden beds, in a word, all the furniture of the counting-room, and the three chambers overhead, was not worth a thousand francs, including a colossal iron safe set into the wall, a legacy from his predecessors, in front of which the boy slept with two dogs at his feet.

Graslin did not go much into society, where he was so much talked about. Two or three times a year he dined with the receiver-general, with whom he was constantly brought in contact in matters of business. He sometimes dined at the prefecture: he had been appointed a member of the general council of the department, to his great regret. "It was a waste of time," he said. Sometimes his business

associates, when he was negotiating transactions with them, kept him to breakfast or to dinner. And he was in duty bound to visit his former employers, who passed their winters at Limoges. He cared so little for social connections that, in twenty-five years, he had not offered so much as a glass of water to any man on earth. When Graslin passed through the street, people pointed him out to one another, saying: "There's Monsieur Graslin!" which was equivalent to: "There's a man who came to Limoges without a sou and has built up an immense fortune!" The Auvergnat banker was held up by more than one father as a model for his child to follow, he was an epigram that more than one wife threw in her husband's face. It is easy to understand by what sequence of ideas this man, who had become the pivot of all the financial machinery of the Limousin, was led to reject the various proposals of marriage which people did not tire of making to him. The daughters of Messieurs Perret and Grossetête had been married before Graslin was in a position to marry them; but, as all of those ladies had young daughters, Graslin was at last left in peace, on the assumption that either old Perret or the crafty Grossetête had arranged beforehand for Graslin's union with one of their granddaughters.

Sauviat followed more closely and more seriously than anyone the upward march of his compatriot; he had known him at the time of his first settlement in Limoges; but their respective positions changed so

materially, at least in appearance, that their friendship had become superficial and was rarely refreshed. Nevertheless, in his capacity of compatriot, Graslin never disdained to talk with Sauviat, when they happened to meet. Both of them had retained their primitive familiar form of address, but only in the Auvergne patois. When the receiver-general at Bourges, the youngest of the Grossetête brothers, married his daughter, in 1823, to the youngest son of the Comte de Fontaine, Sauviat guessed that the Grossetêtes did not choose to admit Graslin to their family.

After his conference with the banker, Père Sauviat returned joyfully to dinner in his daughter's room, and said to the two women:

"Véronique will be Madame Graslin."

"Madame Graslin!" cried Mère Sauviat, in utter stupefaction.

"Is it possible?" said Véronique, to whom Graslin was personally a stranger, but in whose imagination he appeared as one of the Rothschilds appears in the imagination of a Parisian grisette.

"Yes, it's all settled," said old Sauviat, solemnly. "Graslin will furnish his house magnificently; he will have the finest Paris carriage and the handsomest Limousin horses for our daughter; he will buy an estate for five hundred thousand francs for her, and make his house over to her; in fact, Véronique will be the first woman in Limoges, the richest in the department, and she will do what she likes with Graslin!"

Her education, her religious ideas, her unlimited affection for her father and mother, her ignorance, prevented Véronique from imagining a single objection; it did not even occur to her that they had disposed of her without her permission. The next day Sauviat went to Paris and was absent about a week.

Pierre Graslin was, as you will imagine, little inclined to talk; he went straight and speedily to the fact. A thing determined upon was a thing done. In February, 1823, a strange report burst upon Limoges like a thunder-clap: the Graslin mansion was being sumptuously furnished, vans from Paris passed through the gate in endless succession and were unpacked in the courtyard. The town was filled with gossip concerning the beauty and taste of furniture, modern or antique, according to the fashion. The house of Odiot sent down a magnificent service of silver plate by the mail-coach. And, lastly, three carriages, a calèche, a coupé, and a cabriolet, arrived swathed in straw like jewels.

"Monsieur Graslin is to be married!"

Those words were uttered by every mouth in a single evening, in the salons of the first society, in the domestic circle, in the shops, in the suburbs, and ere long throughout the Limousin. But whom was he to marry? No one could answer. There was a mystery at Limoges.

After Sauviat's return, Graslin made his first evening call, at half-past nine. Véronique, who had been notified of his coming, was awaiting him, dressed in her high-necked blue silk, over which fell

a lawn neckerchief with a broad hem. Her hair, divided into two smooth bandeaux, was gathered in a knob behind her head, in the Grecian style. She was sitting in an upholstered chair, beside her mother, who sat at the corner of the hearth in a capacious easy-chair with a carved back, covered with red satin, a relic from some old château. A fire was burning brightly on the hearth. On the mantel, on each side of an old-fashioned clock, of the value of which the Sauviats certainly had no idea, were six candles in two old copper candlesticks representing vine-branches, which lighted up that dingy room and Véronique in all the flower of her beauty. The old mother had put on her best dress. In the silence of that retired quarter, at that silent hour, from the semi-darkness of the old stairway, Graslin appeared to the innocent and modest Véronique, who was still under the spell of the sweet thoughts of love inspired by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's book.

Graslin was short and thin, with a head of thick black hair like the bristles in a hair-brush, which brought out his face in bold relief,—a face as red as that of a drunkard emeritus, and covered with angry-looking pimples, bleeding or ready to prick. Although they indicated neither leprosy nor herpes, those results of a blood heated by constant toil, by anxiety, by the mad rush of business, by late hours, by sobriety, by a virtuous life, seemed to partake of the nature of both those diseases. Despite the advice of his partners, his clerks, and his physician,

the banker had never been able to subject himself to the medical precautions which would have warded off or mitigated that disease, which was very slight at first, but grew worse from day to day. He wished to be cured, he took baths for some days and drank the remedies prescribed; but, carried away by the swift current of business, he neglected his physical welfare. He thought of suspending his operations for a few days, of travelling, of going to the waters for treatment; but what hunter of millions ever pauses in the chase? In that eager face gleamed two gray eyes, striped with greenish lines that radiated from the pupil, and dotted with brown spots; two covetous eyes, two keen eyes that pierced to the depths of the heart, two implacable eyes, overflowing with determination, with uprightness, with shrewdness. Graslin had a turned-up nose, thick lips, a retreating forehead, glistening cheek-bones, thick ears, with broad rims corroded by the impurity of his blood; in short, he was the satyr of old, the faun in a frock-coat and black satin waistcoat, with a white cravat around his neck. The stout, muscular shoulders, which had once carried heavy loads, were already bent; below that over-developed bust were slender legs, ill-fitted to short thighs. The hands, which were thin and hairy, had the hooked fingers of men accustomed to counting money. The wrinkles extended from the cheek-bones to the mouth in even furrows, as is the case with all men intent upon material interests. The habit of forming rapid decisions could be seen in the

way in which the eyebrows were raised toward each lobe of the forehead. Although unsmiling and tightly closed, the mouth denoted hidden kindness, a warm heart buried under the cares of business, suffocated, perhaps, but capable of renewing its life at a woman's touch. At his appearance Véronique's heart contracted violently, a black cloud passed before her eyes; she imagined that she cried out, but she remained silent, staring at vacancy.

"Véronique, this is Monsieur Graslin," said old Sauviat.

Véronique rose, bowed, fell back upon her chair and glanced at her mother, who was smiling at the millionaire, and who, as well as Sauviat himself, seemed happy, oh! so happy, that the poor girl found strength to conceal her surprise and her intense feeling of repulsion. In the conversation which ensued, Graslin's health was mentioned. The banker surveyed himself artlessly in the mirror with carved claws and ebony frame.

"I am not handsome, mademoiselle," he said.

And he explained the eruption on his face by his busy life, he told how he disobeyed his doctor's orders; he flattered himself that his appearance would change as soon as a wife should assume command in his household, and should take better care of him than he was wont to take of himself.

"Does a woman marry a man for his face, old fellow?" said the old junk-dealer, with a resounding smack upon his compatriot's leg.

Graslin's explanation was addressed to those natural feelings with which every woman's heart is more or less filled. Véronique reflected that her own face had been marred by a horrible disease, and her Christian modesty caused her to revise her first impression. Hearing a whistle in the street, Graslin went down, followed by Sauviat in some alarm. Both speedily returned. The office-boy brought the first bouquet of flowers, which was somewhat behind time. When the banker exhibited that bunch of exotic blossoms, whose perfume invaded the room, and offered them to his future bride, Véronique experienced emotions diametrically opposed to those which the first sight of Graslin had caused; it was as if she were transported to the ideal, visionary world of nature in the tropics. She had never seen white camellias, she had never smelt the Alpine clover, the garden-mint, the jasmine of the Azores, the musk-roses, in a word, all those divine odors which act as excitants of affection and sing hymns of perfume to the heart.

Graslin left Véronique under the spell of that emotion. After Sauviat's return, the banker, when everyone in Limoges was asleep, would slink along close against the walls to Père Sauviat's house. He would knock softly on the shutters, the dog would not bark, the old man would go down and open the door to his countryman, and Graslin would pass an hour or two with Véronique in the dingy room. There Graslin always found his Auvergnat supper, served by Mère Sauviat. The strange lover never

appeared without bringing Véronique a bouquet of the rarest flowers, gathered in the greenhouse of Monsieur Grossetête, the only person in Limoges who was in the secret of the marriage. The office-boy went after dark to fetch the bouquet, which old Grossetête put together with his own hands. In two months, Graslin called about fifty times; every time he brought some handsome present: rings, a watch, a gold chain, a work-basket, etc. A single word will explain this extraordinary lavishness. Véronique's marriage portion consisted of almost the whole of her father's fortune, seven hundred and fifty thousand francs. The old man retained an investment of eight thousand francs a year in the public funds, representing an original investment of sixty thousand francs in *assignats*, made for him by his confrère Brézac, to whom he had entrusted the certificate at the time of his imprisonment, and who had always kept it for him, persuading him not to sell it. That sixty thousand francs in *assignats* was half of Sauviat's fortune at the time when he almost met his death upon the scaffold. In that emergency, Brézac had faithfully taken care of the balance, consisting of seven hundred louis d'or, an enormous sum, with which the Auvergnat resumed operations as soon as he recovered his liberty. In thirty years each of those louis had changed to a thousand-franc note, with the assistance of the income from the investment in the Funds, the Champagnac inheritance, the accumulated profits of his business, and of his share in the association, which increased in value in

the hands of the house of Brézac. Brézac had an honest friendship for Sauviat, such as Auvergnats are wont to have for one another.

When Sauviat went and gazed at the façade of the hôtel Graslin, he would say to himself:

"Véronique will live in that palace!"

He knew that there was no other girl in the Limousin with a dowry of seven hundred and fifty thousand francs, and two hundred and fifty thousand in expectation. Wherefore Graslin, the son-in-law of his choice, could not fail to marry Véronique. Every evening Véronique had a bouquet, which adorned her little salon the next day, and which she concealed from the neighbors. She admired all the dainty jewels, the pearls, the diamonds, the rubies, the bracelets, in which all of Eve's daughters take delight; she thought that she was less ugly when arrayed in them. She saw that her mother was overjoyed with the marriage, and she had no basis of comparison; moreover, she knew nothing of the duties, the object of marriage; and, lastly, she heard the solemn voice of the vicar of Saint-Etienne extolling Graslin as a man of honor, with whom she would lead an honorable life. Véronique consented therefore to receive Monsieur Graslin's attentions. When, in a solitary, meditative life like Véronique's, there is a single person who comes every day, that person cannot be indifferent; either he is hated, and aversion justified by thorough acquaintance with character is unendurable; or the habit of seeing him benumbs the eyes, so to speak, so far as his bodily

defects are concerned. The mind seeks compensations. A certain face keeps our curiosity employed; the features become animated, perhaps, and some fleeting charm becomes manifest in them. Then you end by discovering the real substance that is concealed beneath the outer form. In short, the first impressions once overcome, the attachment becomes the stronger because the heart clings obstinately to it as a creation of its own. Love is born. There is the secret of the passions conceived by lovely young women for persons externally ugly. Physical form, forgotten by affection, is no longer visible in a being whose heart thenceforth is the only subject of interest. Moreover, beauty, which is so essential to a woman, assumes such a strange character in man, that there is perhaps as much difference of opinion between women concerning the beauty of men as between men concerning the beauty of women.

After much reflection, therefore, after many discussions with herself, Véronique consented to the publication of the banns. Thereafter that incredible event was the sole subject of conversation in Limoges. No one knew the secret: the enormous figure of the dowry. If the amount of the dowry had been known, Véronique might have chosen a husband for herself; but perhaps she would have been deceived! Graslin was supposed to be deeply in love. Upholsterers came down from Paris to set the house in order. The banker's lavish expenditure was the all-absorbing topic in Limoges: people

MONSIEUR GRASLIN TO VÉRONIQUE

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Véronique rose, bowed, fell back upon her chair and glanced at her mother.

estimated the value of the chandeliers, they described the decorations of the salon, the subjects represented by the clock-cases, the jardinières, the reclining-chairs, the lovely bric-a-brac, the novelties. In the garden of the hôtel Graslin, on top of an ice-house, was a dainty bird-house, and everyone was amazed to see therein rare birds, parroquets, Chinese pheasants, and ducks of the unfamiliar breeds; people came from far and near to see them. Monsieur and Madame Grossetête, elderly people, much esteemed in Limoges, made several visits to the Sauviats, accompanied by Graslin. Madame Grossetête, a most respectable person, congratulated Véronique upon her good fortune. Thus the Church, the family, society, everybody and everything, no matter how unimportant, were accessory to this marriage.

In the month of April the official invitations were distributed among all Graslin's acquaintances. At eleven o'clock on a lovely day, a calèche and a coupé drawn by the Limousin horses selected by old Grossetête, harnessed in the English fashion, drew up in front of the junk-dealer's modest shop, bringing the bridegroom's former partners and his two clerks, to the intense agitation of the neighborhood. The street was filled with people who had assembled to see Sauviat's daughter, upon whose lovely hair the most renowned hair-dresser in Limoges had arranged the bridal wreath, and a veil of the most expensive English lace. Véronique was simply dressed in white muslin. An imposing gathering of the most

distinguished women of the town awaited the bridal party at the cathedral, where the bishop, knowing the sincere piety of the Sauviats, condescended to marry Véronique. The bride was generally considered ugly. She entered her new home and proceeded from surprise to surprise. A State dinner was to precede the ball, to which Graslin had invited almost all Limoges. The dinner, given to the bishop, the prefect, the president of the court, the procureur-général, the mayor, the general, and Graslin's former partners and their wives, was a triumph for the bride, who, like all simple and unaffected persons, displayed unforeseen charms. As neither the bride nor the groom knew how to dance, Véronique continued to do the honors of her house, and won the esteem and goodwill of the greater part of those persons whose acquaintance she made, seeking information concerning each of them from Grossetête, who conceived a warm friendship for her. Thus she avoided all mistakes. During this festivity, the two ex-bankers made known the amount of the fortune given by old Sauviat to his daughter, an immense fortune in the Limousin. At nine o'clock the junk-dealer went home to bed, leaving his wife to preside at the bride's retiring. It was said in the town that Madame Graslin was ugly but well-formed.

Old Sauviat settled up his business, and sold his house in the town. He bought a country-house on the left bank of the Vienne, between Limoges and Cluzeau, ten minutes' walk from Faubourg Saint-Martial, where he proposed to end his days in peace

with his wife. The two old people had apartments of their own in the hôtel Graslin, and dined once or twice a week with their daughter, who often made their house the goal of her walks. That inactivity nearly killed the old junk-dealer. Luckily, Graslin found a means of employing his father-in-law. In 1823 the banker was obliged to take over a porcelain manufactory, having advanced a large amount to the owners, who were unable to pay him except by selling him their establishment. With the assistance of his business connections, and by putting some money into the concern, Graslin made it one of the leading factories in Limoges, and sold it three years later at a handsome profit. He entrusted the superintendence of that large establishment, which was located in Faubourg Saint-Martial, to his father-in-law, who, notwithstanding his seventy-two years, was largely responsible for the fortunate result of the affair, and who grew younger in the process. Thus Graslin was able to attend to his business in the town, without concerning himself about an industry which, but for the passionate activity of old Sauviat, might have obliged him to take one of his clerks into partnership and thus lose a portion of the profit which he made, in addition to saving the capital involved.

Sauviat died in 1827, as the result of an accident. While superintending the taking of an inventory at the factory, he fell into a *charasse*, a sort of box with no cover but a grating, in which porcelain is packed. He wounded his leg slightly and did not attend to it; gangrene set in, he refused to allow the leg to

be amputated, and died. The widow gave up about two hundred and fifty thousand francs, the amount of Sauviat's property, contenting herself with an annuity of two hundred francs a month, which was amply sufficient for her needs, and which her son-in-law agreed to pay her. She retained her little country-house, where she lived alone, without a servant; her daughter could not induce her to swerve from that decision, in which she persisted with the obstinacy peculiar to old people. Mère Sauviat went to see her daughter almost every day, just as her daughter continued to make the country-house the goal of her walks. It commanded a lovely view of the Vienne, and from it could be seen the little island of which Véronique was so fond, and which she had once called her Ile de France.

In order not to interrupt the history of the Graslin household, it is necessary to bring the story of the Sauviats to a close, anticipating the happening of these events, a knowledge of which will be useful, moreover, to a comprehension of the secret life led by Madame Graslin. Her old mother, having remarked how Graslin's avarice was likely to embarrass her daughter, refused for a long while to relinquish the balance of her fortune; but Véronique, who had no reason to anticipate any one of those emergencies in which women desire to have the disposal of their own property, insisted, for reasons instinct with nobility of sentiment,—she desired to thank Graslin for having restored the liberty she had had as a girl.

The unaccustomed splendor of Graslin's marriage

and the attendant festivities had disturbed all his habits and fretted his nature. That great financier had a very small mind. Véronique had had no opportunity to judge the man with whom she was to pass her life. During his fifty-five visits, Graslin had never allowed her to see anything but the man of business, the tireless worker, who divined opportunities, who conceived and carried out great enterprises, and analyzed public affairs, reducing them all to the scale of the Bank. Fascinated by the father-in-law's million, the parvenu made a display of generosity as a matter of business; but, if he did things on a grand scale, he was led on by the springtime of marriage, and by what he called his *folly*—by that house which is called to this day the hôtel Graslin. Having provided himself with horses, a calèche, a coupé, he naturally made use of them to return his wedding calls, to attend the dinner-parties and balls, known as *retours de noces*, at which the chief government officials and the wealthy business men entertained the newly-married couple. In obedience to the impulse which carried him outside his natural sphere, Graslin appointed a reception day and imported a cook from Paris. For about a year he lived as a man ought to live who possessed sixteen hundred thousand francs, and who had three millions at his disposal, including the funds that were placed in his hands. He was at this time the most pronounced personage in Limoges. During that year, he generously placed twenty-five louis in Madame Graslin's purse each month.

The best society of the town was much interested in Véronique in the first months succeeding her marriage, which was a sort of windfall to the public curiosity, generally without nourishment in the provinces. Véronique was the more carefully observed in that she appeared in society as a sort of phenomenon; but she maintained the simple and modest bearing of one who keeps a close watch upon manners and customs and unfamiliar things, wishing to conform to them. Having been previously proclaimed as ugly but well-formed, she was thenceforth considered a good soul, but stupid. She was learning so many things, she had so much to listen to and to see, that her manner, her conversation, justified that judgment in a measure. She had, moreover, a sort of torpor which resembled lack of intellect. Marriage, that difficult trade, as she called it, in connection with which the Church, the Code, and her mother counselled the greatest resignation, the most absolute obedience, under pain of violating all human laws and of causing irreparable misfortune, plunged her into a dazed condition which sometimes bordered upon downright vertigo. Silent and pensive, she listened to herself as much as she listened to others. Feeling what Fontenelle calls the most extreme difficulty in *being*, a difficulty which constantly increased, she was terrified at herself. Nature rebelled under the orders of the mind, and the body lost touch with the will. The poor creature, caught in the snare, wept upon the bosom of the mother of the poor and afflicted, she had recourse

to the Church, her piety redoubled in fervor, she confided the wiles of the demon to her virtuous confessor, she prayed. Never in her life did she perform her religious duties with more intense ardor than at that time. Despair, caused by her inability to love her husband, drove her to the altar's foot, where divine, consoling voices bade her have patience. She was patient and gentle, she continued to live, awaiting the joys of maternity.

"Did you see Madame Graslin this morning?" the women would say among themselves; "marriage is not a success with her, she was green."

"True, but would you have given your daughter to a man like Monsieur Graslin? A woman doesn't marry such a monster with impunity!"

After Graslin was married, all the mothers who had been hunting him for ten years overwhelmed him with epigrams. Véronique lost flesh and became really ugly. Her eyes lost their sparkle, her features grew coarse, she seemed shamefaced and embarrassed. Her expression was marked by that sad indifference so often made a subject of reproach to devout women. Her face assumed a grayish tinge. She dragged herself languidly along during that first year after her marriage, ordinarily such a brilliant period for young wives. She soon sought distraction in reading, availing herself of the married woman's privilege of reading everything. She read Walter Scott's novels, Lord Byron's poems, the works of Schiller and Goethe, the masterpieces of ancient and modern literature. She learned to ride,

to dance, and to draw. She painted in water-color and sepia, seeking with ardor all the resources with which women contend against the *ennui* of solitude. In short, she gave herself that second education which almost all women owe to a man, but which she owed to herself alone. The superiority of a free, open nature, reared as in a desert, but fortified by religion, had imparted a sort of savage grandeur, and awakened demands which provincial society could not satisfy. All books described love, she looked about for something to which to apply her reading, and could discover no passion anywhere. Love remained in her heart in the condition of a seed awaiting a sunbeam. Her profound melancholy, engendered by constant meditations concerning herself, led her back through obscure paths to the brilliant dreams of the last days of her unmarried life. More than once she recalled the romantic poems she once composed, becoming both their scene and their subject. Again she saw that flower-girt, perfumed island, bathed in light, where everything caressed the heart. Often her lustreless eyes gazed about the salons with eager curiosity: all the men resembled Graslin, she studied them and seemed to question their wives; but, as she discovered none of her private griefs depicted upon their faces, she became depressed and sad once more, anxious concerning herself. The authors she had read in the morning responded to her most exalted sentiments, their talent gave her pleasure; and in the evening she listened to trite remarks which were not even

disguised beneath an appearance of wit, conversation that was either foolish and vapid, or concerned entirely with local, personal interests of no importance to her. She was amazed at the warmth displayed in discussions which involved no question of sentiment, to her the soul of life. Often she would sit with eyes fixed on vacancy, as if in a stupor, thinking doubtless of the hours of her ignorant youth, passed in that chamber filled with harmony, now destroyed like herself. The thought of falling into the gulf of petty interests in which the women dwelt among whom she was compelled to live, was horribly repugnant to her. This disdain, which was written on her brow and lips, and ill-disguised, was taken for the insolence of an upstart. Madame Graslin noticed a cold expression upon every face, and felt in everybody's speech a bitterness of which she did not know the cause, for she had not as yet succeeded in becoming sufficiently intimate with one of her own sex to be enlightened or advised by her. Injustice, which causes petty minds to rise in revolt, forces lofty minds to retreat within themselves and imparts to them a sort of humility: Véronique blamed herself, sought to divine wherein she had done wrong; she tried to be affable, she was called false; she became doubly gentle in her manner, she was looked upon as a hypocrite, and her piety furnished fresh ammunition for calumny; she spent money, she gave balls and dinner-parties, and she was accused of ostentation.

Unfortunate in all her attempts, misjudged, disgusted by the mean, sordid pride that distinguishes

provincial society, where everyone is always armed with prejudices and anxieties, Madame Graslin returned to a life of absolute solitude. She rushed joyfully back to the arms of the Church. Her noble mind, surrounded by such weak flesh, caused her to see in the numerous commandments of the catechism so many stones planted along the brink of the precipices of life, so many props brought by charitable hands to sustain human weakness during the journey; she performed, therefore, with the utmost strictness, all the duties enjoined by the Church, even the most trivial. Thereupon the liberal party wrote Madame Graslin down among the pious women of the town, she was classed among the ultras. Thus, to the various grievances which Véronique had innocently heaped up, party spirit added its periodical irritations; but, as she lost nothing by that ostracism, she abandoned society and devoted herself to reading, which offered unlimited resources. She reflected upon the books she read, she compared the different styles, she expanded immeasurably the range of her intellect and the extent of her knowledge, and thus she opened the door of her mind to curiosity. During that period of persistent study, due to the influence of religion upon her mind, she cultivated the friendship of Monsieur Grossetête, one of those old men whose superior faculties become somewhat rusted by provincial life, but who, at the contact of a keen intellect, strike fire now and again. The goodman became deeply interested in Véronique, who rewarded

him for the flattering and kindly warmheartedness peculiar to old men by exhibiting to him, first of all, the treasures of her heart and the luxuriance of her intellect, cultivated so secretly, and at that time laden with flowers. A fragment of a letter written to Monsieur Grossetête during that period will describe the frame of mind of that woman, who was to give proof thereafter of such a steadfast and lofty character.

"The flowers you sent me for the ball were charming, but they suggested cruel thoughts to me. Those pretty blossoms, plucked by you and destined to die upon my bosom and in my hair, as part of the decorations of a fête, made me think of those that are born and die in your woods, unseen, their fragrance breathed by no one. I asked myself why I danced, why I arrayed myself in fine clothes, just as I ask God why I am in this world. You see, my friend, everything is a snare for the unfortunate; the most trivial things bring an invalid's mind back to his disease; but the greatest curse of certain diseases is the persistence which makes them become fixed ideas. Would not a constant pain be a divine thought? You love flowers for themselves, whereas I love them as I love to hear beautiful music. In like manner, as I told you, I miss the secret of a multitude of things. You, my old friend, have a passion, you are a horticulturist. On your return to town, communicate your taste to me, so that I may fly, light of foot, to my greenhouse, as you go to yours to watch the development of the plants, to blossom and flower with them, to admire what you have created; to discover new, unhoped-for combinations of color appear and multiply before your eyes by virtue of your labors. I feel a heart-breaking *ennui*. My greenhouse contains only suffering souls. The miseries which I strive to lighten make my heart sad, and, when I make them my own, when, after I have found some young wife

without clothes for her new-born child, some old man without bread, I have provided for their needs, the emotion caused by the distress I have relieved is not enough for my heart. Ah! my friend, I feel within me a superb force,—an evil force, perhaps,—which nothing can crush, which the sternest injunctions of religion do not quell. When I go to see my mother, and find myself alone in the fields, I am seized with a longing to cry out, and I do cry out. It seems as if my body were a prison in which some evil genie detains a groaning creature who awaits the mysterious words which are destined to shatter an importunate shape. But the comparison is not a just one. In my case, on the contrary, it is the body that suffers from *ennui*, if I may so express myself. Religion engrosses my soul; reading and its treasures furnish never-failing food for my mind. Why do I desire a sorrow which will interrupt the enervating tranquillity of my life? If some sentiment, some mania to cultivate, does not come to my aid, I feel that I shall plunge into an abyss where all ideas grow stale, where the character shrinks, where the springs of life relax, where the faculties lose their substance, where all the mental forces become dissipated, and where I shall cease to be the being that nature intended me to be. That is the meaning of my outcries.—I trust that they will not prevent your sending me flowers. Your sweet and generous friendship has reconciled me with myself these last months. Yes, I am happy to know that you cast a friendly glance upon my heart, at once a desert and a garden of flowers; that you find a kindly word to welcome the return of the half-crushed fugitive who has been riding the restive horse of her dreams!"

At the close of the third year of his married life, Graslin, seeing that his wife no longer used her horses, and finding a favorable opportunity, sold them; he also sold the carriages, dismissed the coachman, allowed the bishop to take his man cook, and

filled his place with a woman. He ceased to give his wife money, telling her that he would pay all the bills. He was the most fortunate husband on earth, meeting with no resistance to his will on the part of the wife who had brought him a dowry of a million. Madame Graslin, having been brought up without any knowledge of money, without being obliged to look upon it as an indispensable element in life, deserved no credit for her self-abnegation. Graslin found in a corner of the desk the sums he had given his wife, less what she had expended in alms and upon her dress, which had cost her but little on account of the profusion with which her wedding trousseau had been supplied. Graslin held up Véronique to all Limoges as the model of wives. He deplored the magnificence of his furniture and had it all packed away. His wife's bedroom, boudoir, and dressing-room were excepted from his economical measures, which served no purpose, for furniture wears out under coverings as quickly as without coverings. He lived on the ground-floor of his house, where his offices were established, and he resumed his former mode of life, hunting for business with the same energy as in the past. The Auvergnat considered himself an excellent husband because he partook of the breakfast and dinner prepared under his wife's supervision; but he was so unpunctual that he did not begin a meal with her ten times in a month; with great delicacy he insisted that she should not wait for him. Nevertheless, Véronique remained until he came, in order to

wait upon him herself, wishing to fulfil her duties as wife in some visible respect.

The banker, who was quite indifferent to the details of married life and in whose eyes his wife simply stood for seven hundred and fifty thousand francs, never noticed Véronique's feeling of repulsion. By insensible degrees he abandoned Madame Graslin for his business. When he expressed a wish to place a bed in a room adjoining his office, she hastened to gratify him. Thus, three years after her marriage, those two ill-assorted beings found themselves once more in their original spheres, and were equally happy to return to them. The moneyed man, with his eighteen hundred thousand francs, returned with the more ardor to his miserly ways, because he had laid them aside for a moment; his two clerks and his office-boy were more comfortably lodged and a little better fed: that was the difference between the present and the past. His wife had a cook and a maid, two indispensable servants; but nothing beyond what was absolutely necessary went out of his strong-box for household expenses. Véronique, overjoyed at the turn affairs had taken, saw in the banker's happiness the compensation for the separation for which she would never have asked; it was not possible for her to be so disagreeable to Graslin as Graslin was repulsive to her. This secret divorce made her sad and joyous at once; she looked forward to maternity to give an interest to her life, but, notwithstanding their mutual resignation, the husband

and wife reached the year 1828 without having had a child.

Thus, in her magnificent house, envied by a whole town, Madame Graslin lived in the same solitude as in her father's hovel, without the hope, without the childlike joys of ignorance. She lived there among the ruins of her castles in Spain, enlightened by sad experience, upheld by her religious faith, devoted to the poor of the town, whom she overwhelmed with benefactions. She made layettes for the children, she gave mattresses and sheets to those who lay on straw; she went everywhere, attended by her maid, a young Auvergnat whom her mother procured for her, and who was devoted to her, body and soul; she made of her a virtuous spy, whose mission it was to discover places where there was suffering to be relieved, misery to be lightened. This active benevolence, combined with the most scrupulous fulfilment of her religious duties, was shrouded in the deepest mystery, although it was carried on under the direction of the curés of the town, with whom Véronique planned all her good works, in order that money which would be useful in relieving undeserved misfortunes might not be wasted in the hands of vice. During that period she won a friendship that was quite as warm and quite as precious to her as old Grossetête's: she became the beloved ewe-lamb of a priest of superior intellect, persecuted for his unappreciated talent,—one of the grand vicars of the diocese, named Abbé

Dutheil. That priest belonged to that infinitesimal fraction of the French clergy who lean toward some concessions, who would be glad to have the Church become associated with the interests of the common people, so that it might regain, by the application of the true doctrine of the Gospel, its former influence over the masses, whom it could then bring to the support of the monarchy. Whether because Abbé Dutheil had become convinced of the impossibility of enlightening the court of Rome and the upper clergy, or because he had sacrificed his own opinions to those of his superiors, he kept himself within the limits of the strictest orthodoxy, knowing that the bare enunciation of his principles would effectually bar his path to a bishopric. That eminent priest presented the combination of very great Christian modesty with a strong character. Without arrogance or ambition, he remained at his post, performing his duties amid dangers. The liberals of the town knew nothing of the motives of his conduct, they based their judgment upon his opinions, and reckoned him as a patriot, a word which signifies revolutionist in the language of Catholics. Beloved by his inferiors, who dared not proclaim his merit, but feared by his equals, who kept a close watch upon him, he was an embarrassment to the bishop. His virtues and his great knowledge, envied perhaps, warded off persecution; it was impossible to complain of him, although he criticised the bungling policy by which the throne and the clergy mutually compromised each other; he declared its results

in advance and without success, like poor Cassandra, who was cursed with equal fervor before and after the downfall of her country. In the absence of a revolution, Abbé Dutheil was destined to hold his place like one of those stones, out of sight in the foundations, on which the whole structure rests. His usefulness was recognized, but he was left where he was, like most of the eminent minds whose accession to power is the bugbear of mediocrities. If he had taken up the pen, like Abbé de Lamennais, he would doubtless have called down the anathemas of Rome as he did.

Abbé Dutheil was an imposing personage. His external appearance indicated one of those profound natures always placid and tranquil on the surface. His great height, his spareness, did not impair the general effect of his figure, which reminded one of those which the genius of the Spanish artists has most affected to represent the great monastic thinkers, and those which Thorwaldsen has recently conceived for his *Apostles*. Those long, almost rigid folds of the face, harmonizing with those of the clothing, have that charm which the Middle Ages emphasized in the mystic statues set up in the doorways of its churches. Gravity of thought, of language, and of accent were in perfect accord in Abbé Dutheil and became him well. Looking at his black eyes, sunken by mortification of the flesh and surrounded by dark rings, his forehead as yellow as an old stone, his almost fleshless face and hands, no one would have expected a different voice or different sentiments

from those which issued from his mouth. That purely physical grandeur, in accord with his mental grandeur, gave the priest a haughty, disdainful air, which was instantly contradicted by his modesty and by his words, but which did not prepossess people in his favor. In a more exalted station, such advantages would have caused him to obtain that ascendency over the masses which is so necessary, and which they allow men thus endowed to assume; but superiors never forgive their inferiors the possession of the external appearance of grandeur, nor for displaying that majesty of demeanor, so highly prized by the ancients, which is so often lacking in the mouthpiece of modern governments.

By virtue of one of those strange caprices, which will seem natural only to the most accomplished courtiers, the other vicar-general, Abbé de Grancour, a short, stout man with a florid face and blue eyes, whose opinions were contrary to Abbé Dutheil's, lived on the most excellent terms with him, but without making any public manifestation likely to deprive him of the good graces of the bishop, to whom he would have sacrificed everything. Abbé de Grancour believed in his colleague's merit, he recognized his talents, he subscribed to his doctrine secretly and condemned it in public; for he was one of those people whom mental superiority attracts and intimidates, who hate it and nevertheless cultivate it. "He would embrace me as he pronounced my condemnation," Abbé Dutheil said of him. Abbé de Grancour had neither friends nor enemies, he was

likely to die a vicar-general. He said that he was attracted to Véronique by the desire to advise so pious and benevolent a person, and the bishop approved; but, in his heart, he was delighted to be able to pass an evening now and then with Abbé Dutheil.

These two priests therefore called quite regularly upon Véronique, in order to make a sort of report to her concerning the objects of her bounty, and to discuss methods of combining moral instruction with material assistance. But from year to year Monsieur Graslin tightened the strings of his purse, when he learned, notwithstanding the ingenious deceit of his wife and Aline, that the money he was asked to furnish was not expended upon the house or the toilet. He was wroth when he reckoned how much his wife's alms-giving cost his strong-box. He undertook to keep an account with the cook, he went into all the minutiæ of the household expenses, and showed what an excellent manager he was by making a practical demonstration of the fact that his house could be kept up handsomely on three thousand francs. Then he made an arrangement with his wife, as between master and clerk, for her expenses, allowing her a hundred francs a month, and boasting of that allowance as a display of royal munificence. The garden connected with his house, being turned over to him, was tended on Sundays by his office-boy, who loved flowers. Having dismissed the gardener, Graslin transformed the conservatory into a store-room, in which he kept the

merchandise deposited with him as security for loans. He allowed the birds in the great aviary on the ice-house to die of hunger, in order to cut off the expense of feeding them. Finally, he took advantage of a winter when there was no frost to refuse to pay the charges for transportation of ice.

In 1828, there was not a single article of luxury that was not condemned. Parsimony reigned unopposed in the hôtel Graslin. The master's face, which had improved during the three years he had passed in intimate relations with his wife, who had made him follow the doctor's prescriptions with scrupulous exactness, became redder, more inflamed, more blotched than before. The business reached such proportions that the office-boy was promoted, as his master had once been, to the post of cashier, and it became necessary to find an Auvergnat for the heavy work of the Graslin establishment. Thus, four years after her marriage, that woman, rich as she was, had not a three-franc piece at her disposal. The avarice of her parents was replaced by the avarice of her husband. Madame Graslin did not realize the necessity of money until her benevolence was balked.

At the beginning of the year 1828, Véronique had recovered the blooming health which was the charm of the innocent girl sitting at her window in the old house on Rue de la Cité; but she had meanwhile acquired profound literary knowledge,—she knew how to think and to talk. Exquisite accuracy of perception gave character to her features. Accustomed as she was to petty social details, she wore

fashionable clothes with infinite grace. When she chanced to appear in a salon, about that period, she found herself, not without surprise, in an atmosphere of respectful esteem. That feeling and that reception were due to the two vicars-general, and to old Grossetête. The bishop and some influential persons, being made acquainted with the story of that lovely hidden life and of her untiring benevolence, had spoken of that flower of true piety, of that violet perfumed with virtue, and there had taken place thereupon, in Madame Graslin's favor, and unknown to her, one of those reactions which are the more solid and enduring because they are of slow growth. This revulsion in feeling brought in its train the influence of Véronique's salon, which, from that time on, was frequented by the notabilities of the town; and this is how it came about. The young Vicomte de Granville was sent to the office of the king's attorney at Limoges, in the capacity of deputy attorney, toward the end of that year, preceded by the reputation which is always manufactured in advance in the provinces for all Parisians. A few days after his arrival, at an evening party at the prefecture, he answered an absurd question that was asked him, with the statement that Madame Graslin was the most agreeable, the most intellectual, and the most distinguished woman in the town.

"Perhaps she is the most beautiful, too?" queried the receiver-general's wife.

"I do not dare to say yes in your presence," he replied. "Therefore I am in doubt. Madame

Graslin's beauty is of a sort that should cause you no jealousy, it is never seen by daylight. Madame Graslin is beautiful in the eyes of those whom she loves, and you are beautiful in everybody's eyes. In Madame Graslin, when the soul is once set in motion by genuine enthusiasm, it imparts to her face an expression which changes it completely. Her face is like a landscape that is depressing in winter, magnificent in summer; the world will always see it in winter. When she talks with friends upon some literary or philosophical subject, upon religious questions in which she is interested, her face lights up, an unknown woman of marvellous beauty suddenly appears before you."

This declaration, based upon the speaker's observation of the phenomenon which formerly rendered Véronique so beautiful as she walked away from the communion table, made a great sensation in Limoges, where, for the moment, the new deputy attorney, who had been promised, so it was said, the place of avocat-général, occupied a position of much prominence. In all provincial towns, a man who stands on a slightly higher level than other men becomes for a greater or less time the object of a passing admiration which resembles enthusiasm, and which deceives its object. It is to this social caprice that we owe the arrondissement geniuses, the unappreciated men and their imaginary talents constantly humiliated. The man whom women thus bring into fashion is more frequently a stranger than a native of the province; but with regard to the

Vicomte de Granville, this admiration, as rarely happens, was not misplaced. Madame Graslin was the only person with whom the Parisian had been able to exchange his ideas and to carry on a conversation upon different subjects. A few months after his arrival, the deputy, attracted by the growing charm of Véronique's conversation and manners, proposed to Abbé Dutheil and some notabilities of the town that they should play whist regularly at Madame Graslin's. Thereafter Véronique received five times a week, for she wished to leave two days free for her household duties, she said. When she had about her the only men of superior parts in the town, some other persons were not slow to award themselves letters-patent of intellectual eminence by joining the circle. Véronique received the three or four most prominent officers of the garrison and the commandant's staff. The freedom of speech which her guests enjoyed, the absolute discretion to which they were bound, without definite agreement, and simply by adopting the manners of the best society, made her extremely strict regarding the admission of those who intrigued to obtain that honor. The women of the town were not exempt from jealousy at the sight of Madame Graslin surrounded by the cleverest and most agreeable men in Limoges; but her power gained in extent in proportion to the reserve she showed; she admitted four or five women who had come from Paris with their husbands, and who held in horror the gossiping propensity of provincials. If any person outside of

that select circle chanced to call, the subject of conversation was changed at once by tacit agreement, and the habitués of the salon talked on trivial subjects only.

Thus the hôtel Graslin was an oasis where superior minds escaped the *ennui* of provincial life, where men connected with the government could open their hearts upon politics without having to fear that their words would be repeated, where everything that was laughable was laughed at in a refined way, where everyone laid aside his professional coat and allowed his true character to assert itself. Thus, after having been the most obscure girl in Limoges, after having been esteemed foolish, ignorant, and ugly, Madame Graslin, at the beginning of the year 1828, was considered the first person in the town and the most illustrious of her own sex. No one came to see her in the morning, for everyone knew her benevolent habits, and the punctuality with which she performed her religious duties; she almost always went to the first mass, in order not to delay her husband's breakfast, for, although he was hopelessly irregular, she wished always to wait upon him. Graslin had at last become used to his wife in that trivial detail. He never missed an opportunity to praise her, he considered her an accomplished woman; she never asked him for anything, he could heap crown upon crown and cut a broad swath in the business field; he had begun to have transactions with the house of Brézac, he was sailing constantly forward upon the

commercial ocean; his over-excited selfishness kept him in the frantic yet tranquil condition of a gambler on the watch for important events on the green cloth of speculation.

During that happy time, which lasted until the beginning of 1829, Madame Graslin, in the eyes of her friends, attained a veritably extraordinary beauty, the causes of which were never satisfactorily explained. The blue of the iris expanded like a flower, and contracted the brown circle of the pupil, seeming to be dipped in a moist, languishing light, overflowing with love. Her forehead, illumined by memories, by happy thoughts, grew white like a mountain peak at dawn, and the lines of her face were purified by some inward fire. Her face lost those bright brown tints which denoted the beginning of inflammation of the liver, the disease of vigorous constitutions or of persons whose hearts are ill at ease, whose affections are thwarted. Her temples became beautifully smooth and white. In fact, her friends saw, at intervals, the divine face, worthy of Raphael, which disease had blurred, as time dims one of that great artist's canvases. Her hands seemed whiter, her shoulders became deliciously plump and round; her graceful, animated movements exhibited her lithe, flexible figure to the best advantage. The women of the town accused her of loving Monsieur de Granville, who paid assiduous court to her, and against whom she erected the barriers of a pious resistance. The deputy attorney professed for her a respectful

admiration which did not deceive the habitués of her salon. The priests and the men of intellect were well aware that that attachment, amorous though it was on the part of the young magistrate, did not go beyond proper limits in the case of Madame Graslin. Weary of a resistance based upon the most pious sentiments, the Vicomte de Granville, to the knowledge of the members of that circle, formed more compliant friendships, which, however, did not interfere with his constant admiration and worship of the fair Madame Graslin, for so was she called at Limoges in 1829.

The most clear-sighted attributed the change of features, which rendered Véronique more charming than ever to her friends, to the secret delight that every woman feels, even the most devout, in being courted, in the satisfaction of living at last in the environment best suited to her mind, in the pleasure of exchanging her ideas, a pleasure that put an end to the *ennui* of her life, in the joy of being surrounded by agreeable, educated men, true friends whose attachment waxed stronger from day to day. Perhaps it would have required even more profound, more keen-sighted or more suspicious observers than the habitués of the hôtel Graslin to divine the savage grandeur, the strength characteristic of the common people, which Véronique had forced back into the depths of her being. If, as sometimes happened, she was taken by surprise when absorbed in meditation, depressed, perhaps, or simply pensive, her friends all knew that she carried the

suffering of many others in her heart, that she had probably been made acquainted that morning with many new miseries, that she went into dens of infamy where vice was appalling in its openness. Often the deputy attorney, soon appointed avocat-général, scolded her for some ill-advised benefaction, which, in the course of preliminary investigations, the authorities had found to be an encouragement of projected crimes.

"Do you need money for any of your poor?" old Grossetête would say to her at such times, taking her hand; "in that case I will be a confederate in your benevolence."

"It is impossible to make everybody rich!" she would answer, with a sigh.

Early in the year 1829, the event occurred that was to change Véronique's inward life completely and to transform the superb expression of her face, making it, by the way, a thousand times more interesting in the eyes of painters. Being seriously alarmed about his health, Graslin, to his wife's great chagrin, refused to occupy longer his rooms on the ground-floor; he went up to his wife's apartments, where he required her to nurse him. Soon there was gossip in Limoges concerning Madame Graslin's condition; she was *enceinte;* her melancholy, mingled with joy, preoccupied her friends, who then divined that, despite her virtuous character, she had been very happy to live apart from her husband. Perhaps she had hoped for a more brilliant destiny, since the day when the avocat-général paid court to

her after refusing to marry the wealthiest heiress in the Limousin. Thereafter the profound politicians who play the police, as to sentiments and fortunes, between two games of whist, had suspected the magistrate and the young woman of founding upon the banker's feeble health hopes that were well-nigh ruined by that event. The serious mental troubles that marked this period of Véronique's life, the anxiety which a first confinement causes a woman, and the fact that it is said to be attended with danger when it happens after the first youth, made her friends more assiduous in their attentions; each of them showed in a thousand little ways how warm and enduring their affection was.

II

TASCHERON

In that same year Limoges enjoyed the terrible spectacle and extraordinary drama of the Tascheron case, in which the young Vicomte de Granville displayed the talents which led to his appointment to the office of procureur-général at a later period.

An old man who lived in an isolated house in Faubourg Saint-Etienne was assassinated. A large orchard separates the house from the faubourg, and it is separated from the open country by a flower-garden, at the end of which are some old abandoned greenhouses. The bank of the Vienne slopes rapidly in front of the estate, being so steep that the river can be seen from the house. The courtyard extended on an inclined plane to the top of the bank, where it was bounded by a low wall with posts at equal intervals connected by a fence, more for ornament than defence, for the rails were of painted wood. This old man, named Pingret, renowned for his avarice, lived with a single servant, a country-girl, whom he required to do his ploughing. He himself tended his wall-fruits, trimmed his trees, gathered his fruit, and sent it

into the town to be sold, together with early vegetables, in the cultivation of which he excelled. The old man's niece and sole heiress, married to a small annuitant in the town, one Monsieur des Vanneaulx, had many times entreated her uncle to hire a man to watch his house, pointing out to him that he would save by it the crops that might be raised on several pieces of land planted with standard trees, where he himself sowed only wretched grain, but he had persistently refused. This inconsistency in a miser furnished food for conjecture in the houses where the Des Vanneaulx passed their evenings. More than once the games of boston were interrupted by the most diverse comments. Some cunning wags concluded that there was a treasure hidden under the grass.

"If I were in Madame des Vanneaulx's place," said one pleasant joker, "I would not worry my uncle; if they murder him, why, they'll murder him. I would take the inheritance."

Madame des Vanneaulx tried to make her uncle provide for his safety, as the managers of the Théâtre-Italien beg their popular tenor to cover his throat well, and lend him their cloaks when he has forgotten his own. She had presented little Pingret with a magnificent watch-dog, and the old man sent him back by Jeanne Malassis, his servant.

"Your uncle don't want another mouth in the house to feed," she told Madame des Vanneaulx.

The result proved how well founded were the niece's fears. Pingret was murdered one dark

night, in the middle of a field of lucerne, where he was probably adding a few louis to the contents of a pot of gold. The servant, aroused by the struggle, had the courage to run to the old miser's assistance, and the murderer had found that he must kill her in order to suppress her testimony. That reflection, which almost always leads assassins to add to the number of their victims, is inspired by the capital punishment that looms before them. This double murder was attended by curious circumstances, which were likely to aid the prosecution as much as the defence. When the neighbors passed a whole morning without seeing little Pingret or his servant; when, as they went and came, they scrutinized his house through the wooden fence and saw the doors and windows closed contrary to all custom, there was a commotion in Faubourg Saint-Etienne, which extended as far as Rue des Cloches, where Madame des Vanneaulx lived. The niece's thoughts were always filled with a possible disaster; she notified the authorities, who burst in the doors. They soon discovered, in the four plots of land, four empty holes, surrounded by the débris of pots that were filled with gold the night before. In two holes that had been partly filled, the bodies of Pingret and Jeanne Malassis had been buried in their clothes. The poor girl had run to the spot, with bare feet, in her chemise.

While the king's attorney, the commissioner of police, and the examining magistrate were collecting the elements of a prosecution, the unfortunate Des

Vanneaulx picked up the débris of the pots, and calculated the amount stolen according to their capacity. The magistrates admitted the accuracy of his calculations, estimating the vanished treasure at a thousand pieces per pot; but were they pieces of forty-eight or forty, twenty-four or twenty francs? All those who were awaiting inheritances in Limoges shared the grief of the Des Vanneaulx. The Limousin imagination was intensely excited by the sight of those broken pots of gold. As for little Père Pingret, who used often to come to market himself with vegetables to sell, who lived on bread and onions, who did not spend three hundred francs a year, who never obliged or disobliged a human being, and who had never done one sou's worth of good in Faubourg Saint-Etienne, not the slightest regret was felt for him. As to Jeanne Malassis, her heroism, which the old miser had ill rewarded, was considered ill judged; the number of people who admired her was small in comparison to those who said: "For my part, I'd have slept right on!" The law officers found neither ink nor pen with which to draw up their report in that bare, dilapidated, cold, uninviting house. The curious bystanders and the heir-at-law thereupon discovered evidences of the contrasts that are noticeable in some misers. The little old man's dismay at the thought of any additional expense was manifest in the unrepaired roofs which showed their open sides to the light, the rain, and the snow; in the green cracks with which the walls were furrowed, in the rotten doors ready to fall at the slightest touch,

and in the windows stuffed with unoiled paper. Everywhere curtainless windows, fireplaces without mirrors or andirons, the clean hearths being furnished with a single log or with small wood almost coated with soot from the flue; broken-legged chairs, two thin, flat couches, cracked kettles, mended plates, one-armed armchairs; at Pingret's bed were curtains which Time had embroidered with his audacious hands; a worm-eaten desk, in which he kept his seeds; linen thickened by darns and patches; and a pile of rags which lived only when sustained by the master's mind, and which, when he was dead, fell in tatters, in dust, in chemical dissolution, in ruins, in an indefinable nameless something, as soon as the brutal hands of the frantic heir or the officers of the law touched them. Those things disappeared as if terrified by the thought of a public sale. The great majority of the people in the capital of the Limousin were deeply interested in the good Des Vanneaulx, who had two children; but, when the authorities believed that they had found the presumed author of the crime, that personage monopolized public attention, he became a hero, and the Des Vanneaulx remained in the shadow of the picture.

Toward the close of the month of March, Madame Graslin had experienced some of those discomforts which are caused by a first pregnancy, and which cannot be concealed. The authorities were still investigating the crime committed in Faubourg Saint-Etienne, and the assassin had not been arrested. Véronique received her friends in her bedroom and

they played whist there. Madame Graslin had not been out for several days; she had had several of those curious caprices which are related of all women in her condition; her mother came to see her almost every day, and they remained together for hours at a time. It was nine o'clock, the card-tables were neglected, for everybody was talking about the murder and the Des Vanneaulx. The avocat-général appeared.

"We have Père Pingret's murderer!" he said in a tone of satisfaction.

"Who is it?" was asked on all sides.

"A workman in a porcelain factory, whose previous conduct has been exemplary, and who was in a fair way to make a fortune.—He worked in the factory your husband formerly owned," he said, turning to Madame Graslin.

"Who is he?" asked Véronique in a weak voice.

"Jean-François Tascheron."

"Poor fellow!" she cried. "Yes, I have seen him several times; my poor father recommended him to me as a fine fellow."

"He left the factory before Sauviat died, and went to work for the Philipparts, who did better by him," observed old Mère Sauviat.—"But is my daughter well enough to listen to this conversation?" she said, glancing at Madame Graslin, who had turned as white as her sheets.

After that evening, Mère Sauviat left her house, and constituted herself her daughter's nurse, despite her sixty-six years. She never left the room;

Madame Graslin's friends found her at all hours stationed heroically at her daughter's pillow, where she devoted her time to her eternal knitting, sheltering Véronique with her glance, as at the time of the small-pox, answering for her, and sometimes turning visitors away. The maternal and filial love of the mother and daughter was so well known in Limoges that the old woman's actions surprised no one. A few days later, when the avocat-général attempted to give some details which the whole town was intensely eager to know concerning Jean-François Tascheron, thinking that it might amuse the invalid, La Sauviat interrupted him abruptly, saying that he would cause Madame Graslin to have more bad dreams. But Véronique, gazing earnestly at Monsieur de Granville, begged him to go on. Thus Madame de Graslin's friends were the first to learn, and at her house, from the mouth of the avocat-général, the result of the investigation, which was soon to be made public. These, succinctly stated, are the main points of the indictment which the prosecuting officers were then preparing:

Jean-François Tascheron was the son of a small farmer burdened with a family, who lived in the village of Montégnac. Twenty years before this crime, famous in the annals of the Limousin, the canton of Montégnac was notorious for its lax morals. The prosecuting officers at Limoges used to say that of every hundred criminals convicted in the department, fifty were from the arrondissement which included Montégnac. Since 1816, two years after

the arrival of the curé Bonnet, Montégnac had lost its unsavory reputation, its people had ceased to send their contingent to the assizes. That change was generally attributed to the influence of Monsieur Bonnet in the commune, formerly the breeding-place of the scoundrels who ravaged the country-side.

The crime of Jean-François Tascheron suddenly restored to Montégnac its old-time celebrity. By a strange caprice of chance, the Tascheron family was almost the only one in the district which had preserved the exemplary, old-fashioned morals and the religious habits which careful observers see to be disappearing more and more rapidly in the country districts; it had, therefore, been the mainstay of the curé, to whose heart its members were naturally very dear. That family, remarkable for its probity, its unity, and its fondness for work, had never set aught but a good example to Jean-François Tascheron. Led to Limoges by the praiseworthy ambition to earn a fortune honestly in the manufacturing industry, the boy had left the village to the regret of his parents and his friends, who were very fond of him. During his two years' apprenticeship, his conduct was worthy of all praise; no visible backsliding had foreshadowed the horrible crime which brought his life to an end.

Jean-François Tascheron had passed in study and self-improvement the time that other workmen devote to the wine-shop and to dissipation. The most minute investigations of the provincial authorities, who have much time to themselves, shed no

light upon the secrets of that existence. Upon being closely questioned, the landlady of the mean, furnished lodging-house where Jean-François lived said that she had never had a young man in her house whose morals were so pure. His disposition was amiable and sweet, sometimes joyous. About a year before the commission of the crime, his humor seemed to have changed, he slept abroad several times a month, often several nights in succession. In what part of the town did he pass those nights? she had no idea. She thought sometimes, however, from the condition of his boots, that her lodger had been in the country. Although he evidently went out of the town, instead of wearing hob-nailed shoes, he wore pumps. Before he started, he shaved, put on clean linen, and perfumed himself. The magistrates carried their investigations into the houses of ill-repute and among disorderly women, but Jean-François Tascheron was unknown there; they sought information among the working-girls and grisettes, but not one of the women whose conduct was open to reproach had had any relations with the accused man.

A crime without a motive is inconceivable, especially in the case of a young man whose leaning toward self-improvement and whose ambition entitled him to be accredited with ideas and common sense on a higher plane than those of other workmen. The prosecuting officers and the examining magistrate attributed the crime committed by Tascheron to the passion for play; but after searching investigation

it was proved that the accused had never gambled. Jean-François took refuge at first in a system of denial, which was likely to fail of its effect before the jury, in the presence of proofs, but which indicated the intervention of some person well acquainted with judicial procedure or endowed with unusual intelligence. The incriminating facts, of which these were the principal ones, were, as in many cases of murder, both important and trivial: Tascheron's absence from home during the night of the crime and his refusal to state where he was, for he scorned to manufacture an alibi; a fragment of his blouse, torn away without his knowledge by the poor servant-girl in the struggle, and found in a tree, where it had been carried by the wind; his presence in the vicinity of the house during the evening, which was noticed by passers-by and by the people of the faubourg, and which none of them would ever have remembered except for the crime; a false key made by himself to enable him to enter by the door opening on the fields, and adroitly buried in one of the holes, two feet below the body, but found by Monsieur des Vanneaulx, who dug down to see if the treasure-house had not two floors. The investigation led to the discovery of the persons who furnished the iron, and lent the vise and the file. That key was the first clew, it directed suspicion to Tascheron, who was arrested on the boundary line of the department, in a wood where he was waiting for a diligence to pass. An hour later, he would have been on his way to America. Finally,

notwithstanding the care with which the footprints were effaced in the ploughed fields and in the muddy road, the municipal keeper found prints of dancing pumps, which were carefully removed and preserved. When Tascheron's room was searched, the soles of his pumps were placed in those prints and corresponded perfectly. This fatal coincidence confirmed the observations of the inquisitive landlady.

The report of the preliminary investigation attributed the crime to some outside influence and not to the initiative of the accused; it inclined to the conclusion that he had had an accomplice, which conclusion was confirmed by the evident impossibility of one man carrying away the buried treasure. However strong a man may be, he does not carry twenty-five thousand francs in gold a very great distance. If each pot had contained that sum, the four would have necessitated four trips. Now there was a singular circumstance that fixed the hour at which the crime was committed. In the alarm caused by her master's outcry, Jeanne Malassis, springing from her bed, had overturned the night-stand on which her watch lay; that watch, the only present the old miser had given her in five years, had its mainspring broken by the fall; it marked two o'clock. In the middle of March, when the crime was committed, the sun rises between five and six o'clock. Thus, whatever distance the money had been carried, Tascheron could not have managed the transportation alone, according to the

hypothesis adopted by the king's attorney and the examining magistrate. The care with which Tascheron had obliterated some footprints, while neglecting his own, pointed to some mysterious assistance. Being forced to invent a motive, the authorities attributed the crime to a frantic passion, and as they failed to find the object of that passion among the lower classes, they looked higher. Perhaps some bourgeoise, sure of the reticence of a young man cast in the mould of a fanatic, had inaugurated a romance of which this was the ghastly catastrophe. That presumption was almost justified by the incidents of the murder. The old man had been killed by blows with a spade. Therefore the crime was the result of a sudden, unlooked-for, accidental fatality. The lovers might well have agreed to commit theft and not murder. Tascheron the lover, and Pingret the miser, two intractable passions, had met upon the same spot, both drawn thither by gold, in the dense darkness of the night.

In order to obtain some light upon this obscure affair, the authorities resorted to the device of arresting a sister whom Jean-François loved dearly, and placing her in solitary confinement, hoping to penetrate, through her, the mystery of her brother's private life. Denise Tascheron took refuge in a policy of silence enjoined by prudence, which caused her to be suspected of having knowledge of the motives of the crime, of which she knew nothing. That confinement blasted her life. The accused exhibited a strength of character very rare among the common

people: he foiled the most adroit spies with whom he was brought in contact, although he did not detect their real character. Thus, in the view of the leading lights of the magistracy, Jean-François was a criminal from passion, not from necessity, like the majority of ordinary assassins, all of whom pass through the police court and the galleys before they arrive at their last stroke. An active and shrewd investigation was instituted in the line of this theory; but the criminal's unwavering reticence left them with nothing to work upon. As soon as this plausible romance of a passion for a woman in the higher social spheres was adopted, Jean-François was subjected to more than one artful examination, but his discretion triumphed over all the moral tortures which the skill of the examining magistrate inflicted upon him. When, in a supreme effort, the magistrate told Tascheron that the woman for whom he had committed the crime was known and arrested, his expression did not change, and he contented himself with replying ironically:

"I should be very glad to see her!"

Upon learning these circumstances, many persons shared the magistrate's suspicions, which the moody silence maintained by the accused seemed to confirm. The public were intensely interested in a young man who was becoming a problem. Everyone will readily understand how violently these details aroused public curiosity, and with what avidity the trial would be followed. Despite the probing of the police, the prosecution had paused

upon the threshold of hypothesis, not daring to penetrate the mystery, it scented so many dangers therein! In certain cases, semi-certainty is not sufficient for the magistrate. It was hoped that the truth would come forth into the light at the Court of Assize, where many criminals contradict themselves.

Monsieur Graslin was one of the jurors drawn for the session, so that, from her husband or from Monsieur de Granville, Véronique was certain to learn the smallest details of the criminal trial which kept the Limousin and all France in a state of excitement for a fortnight. The attitude of the accused justified the theory adopted by the town in accordance with the conjectures of the authorities; more than once his eyes were turned upon the throng of privileged women who came to taste the innumerable emotions of that drama in real life. Each time that his glance embraced that fashionable assemblage with a clear but inscrutable expression, there was a violent commotion, everyone was so afraid of seeming to be his accomplice to the searching eyes of the prosecuting officers and the court.

The fruitless efforts of the authorities were made public, and disclosed the precautions taken by the accused to assure the perfect success of his crime. Some months prior to the fatal night, Jean-François had provided himself with a passport for North America. Thus his plan of leaving France had been formed long before, so that the woman must be married, for it would be useless to flee the

country with an unmarried woman. Perhaps the purpose of the crime had been to place this unknown in comfortable circumstances. The authorities had found no record at the prefecture of any passport for that country issued to a woman. The records at Paris had been consulted, in case the accomplice had provided herself with a passport there; but in vain; and the same with the neighboring prefectures. The most trivial details of the trial disclosed the deep thought of a superior mind. If the most virtuous Limousin ladies attributed the inexplicable use of dancing shoes for travelling about in the mud and the fields to the necessity of keeping watch on old Pingret, the least stupid men were enchanted to explain how useful pumps were for walking about in a house, creeping through corridors and climbing up to windows without noise. It was evident, therefore, that Jean-François and his mistress—young, beautiful, romantic; everyone imagined her a superb creature — had intended to commit forgery, and to insert the words *and his wife* in the passport. In the evening, in all the salons, the games were interrupted by the malicious comments of people who, going back to March, 1829, enumerated the women who were at that time visiting in Paris, and others who might, ostensibly or secretly, have made preparations for flight. Limoges enjoyed a second Fualdès trial, embellished with an unknown Madame Manson. Never was a town more puzzled than Limoges every evening after the session. People dreamed of the trial, in

which everything tended to magnify the prisoner, whose replies, cunningly repeated, extended and commented on, gave rise to abundant discussion. When one of the jurors asked why Tascheron had procured a passport for America, he replied that he intended to set up a porcelain factory there. Thus, without compromising his system of defence, he continued to shield his accomplice, making it possible for everyone to attribute his crime to the necessity of obtaining money to accomplish an ambitious scheme. When these discussions were at their height, it was inevitable that Véronique's friends, some evening, when she seemed somewhat better, should attempt to explain the criminal's reticence. The day before, the doctor had prescribed a walk for Véronique. That very morning, therefore, she had taken her mother's arm and walked around the outskirts of the town as far as La Sauviat's country-house, where she had rested. Upon her return she had attempted to remain on her feet and had waited for her husband. Graslin did not return from the court until eight o'clock; she came from her room to serve his dinner as usual; she necessarily heard the discussion of her friends.

"If my poor father were still alive," Véronique said to them, "we should have known more about it, or perhaps this man would never have become a criminal.—But I see that you are all engrossed by a strange idea! You insist that love was the moving principle of the crime: so far I agree with you; but why do you think that the unknown is a married

woman? May he not have loved some young girl whose father and mother refused him her hand?"

"A young unmarried woman would have belonged to him legitimately sooner or later," replied Monsieur de Granville. "Tascheron is a man who does not lack patience, he would have had time to make his fortune by honest means, pending the time when every girl is free to marry against her parents' will."

"I did not know that such marriages were possible," said Madame Graslin; "but how is it that there never has been the slightest suspicion in a town where everyone knows everyone else, where everyone sees what is going on at his neighbor's? If two people are in love, they must see each other, or at least must have seen each other! What do you magistrates think?" she inquired, gazing earnestly into the avocat-général's eyes.

"We all believe that the woman belongs to the bourgeois or the commercial class."

"I think differently," said Madame Graslin, "a woman of that kind has not sufficiently lofty sentiments."

This remark caused all eyes to be concentrated upon Véronique, and the whole company awaited an explanation of the paradox.

"During the hours of the night when I cannot sleep, and as I lie in bed during the day, I have found it impossible not to think of this mysterious affair, and I have fancied that I could divine Tascheron's motives. This is why I concluded that it

was an unmarried girl. A married woman has selfish interests, if not sentiments, which have some hold upon her heart, and prevent its attaining that condition of absolute exaltation which inspires such a great passion. One must be without children to be capable of a love which combines the sentiment of maternity with those sentiments that proceed from desire. Evidently this man was loved by a woman who wished to be his staff. The unknown must have put forth in her passion the genius to which we owe the fine works of artists and poets, and which exists in woman, but in another shape: it is destined to create men, not things. Our works are our children! Our children are our pictures, our books, our statues. Are we not artists in their early education? So that I would be willing to wager my head that the unknown, even if she be not unmarried, is not a mother. The prosecuting officers need the cunning of women in order to detect innumerable fine distinctions which escape them on many occasions. If I had been your deputy," she said to the avocat-général, "we would have found the guilty woman, assuming that the unknown is guilty. I agree with Monsieur l'Abbé Dutheil, that the lovers had conceived the idea of fleeing with poor Pingret's treasure, for lack of money to live in America. The theft led to the murder, by the fatal logic which the death penalty inspires in criminals. And so," she continued, with a suppliant glance at the avocat-général, "it would be a noble thing for you to abandon the charge of premeditation, you

would save the wretched man's life. That man is great, notwithstanding his crime; perhaps he would atone for his errors by a glorious repentance. The works of repentance should count for something in the estimation of the law. Is there no better way to-day, than to lose his head, or to found, as was once done, the cathedral of Milan, in expiation of his offences?"

"Your ideas are sublime, madame," said the avocat-général; "but, with the premeditation eliminated, Tascheron would still be liable to the death penalty, because of the grave circumstances, established by proof, with which the theft was attended: scaling the wall, entering the house in the night, etc."

"Then you think that he will be convicted?" she said, lowering her eyes.

"I am certain of it, the prosecution will win."

A slight shudder caused Madame Graslin's dress to rustle.

"I am cold!" she said.

She took her mother's arm and went to bed.

"She is much better to-day," her friends said.

The next day Véronique was at death's door. When her doctor expressed his amazement at finding her so critically ill, she said to him, with a smile:

"Did I not tell you that that walk would do me no good?"

From the opening of the trial, Tascheron's conduct was equally free from swaggering and from

hypocrisy. The doctor, to amuse the invalid, tried to account for this attitude, of which his defenders made the best possible use. His counsel's skill deceived the accused as to the result; he believed that he would escape death, said the doctor. At times people noticed on his face a hope which seemed to have reference to a joy greater than that of living. The man's antecedents—he was twenty-three years old at this time—were so at variance with the actions with which his life ended, that his defenders put forward his attitude as conclusive evidence in his favor. In like manner, the proofs, which were overwhelming according to the theory of the prosecution, became so weak in the romantic hypothesis of the defence, that the chances in the contest for the man's head were considered to favor his counsel. In order to save his client's life, the advocate fought desperately on the subject of premeditation; he admitted, hypothetically, the premeditation of the theft, not that of the homicides, which were the result of two unforeseen struggles. Success seemed doubtful to the prosecuting officers themselves, as well as to the bar.

After the doctor's visit, Véronique received a call from the avocat-général, who came to see her every morning before the session.

"I read the arguments yesterday," she said. "To-day the rebuttal will begin; I am so deeply interested in the prisoner that I would like to see him acquitted; can you not, for once in your life, renounce a triumph? Allow the prisoner's counsel

to whip you. Come, make me a present of this life, and perhaps you will have mine some day!—There is a doubt, according to the fine argument of Tascheron's advocate; very good—"

"Your voice is trembling," said the viscount, in some surprise.

"Do you know why?" she replied. "My husband has suggested a ghastly coincidence, which, in my precarious condition, might well cause my death: I shall be confined just at the time that you give the order to cut off that man's head!"

"Can I revise the Code?" said the avocat-général.

"Ah! you do not know how to love!" she replied, closing her eyes.

She let her head fall on the pillow, and dismissed the magistrate with an imperious gesture.

Monsieur Graslin argued earnestly but ineffectually for acquittal, giving a reason which his wife had suggested to him, and which was adopted by two jurors who were friends of his: "If we give this man his life, the Des Vanneaulx family will recover Pingret's money." That irresistible argument led to a division among the jurors, who stood seven against five, which necessitated the interposition of the court; but the court agreed with the minority of the jury. According to the law then in force, that combination resulted in a conviction. When his sentence was pronounced, Tascheron fell into a frenzy of rage not unnatural in a man full of vigor and life, but which, according to the common

experience of judges, counsel, jury, and spectators, is seldom seen in criminals unjustly convicted. It was the universal opinion, therefore, that the drama was not concluded by the sentence. That desperate battle gave rise, as almost always happens in such cases, to two diametrically opposite opinions concerning the guilt of the hero, in whom some saw a persecuted innocent, others a criminal justly condemned. The liberals maintained Tascheron's innocence, less from conviction than as a means of annoying the government.

"The idea," they said, "of convicting a man because of a similarity between his foot and the print of another foot! Or on account of his absence! as if every young man would not prefer to die rather than compromise a woman! Or was it because he borrowed tools and bought iron? for it wasn't proved that he made the key. Or because of a bit of blue cotton hung on a tree, perhaps by old Pingret himself to scare away the sparrows, and that happens to match a rent in one's blouse? What is a man's life good for? And Jean-François denies everything; the prosecution hasn't produced a single witness who saw the crime!"

They approved, expanded, paraphrased the theory and the arguments of the prisoner's counsel. "What was old Pingret? A burst strong-box!" said the wits. Some alleged radicals, disregarding the sacred laws of property, which the Saint-Simonians were already attacking in the abstract order of economical ideas, went still further: "Père

Pingret was the original author of the crime. That man, by hoarding gold as he did, robbed his country. How many enterprises might have been made productive by his useless capital! He had blocked the wheels of business, he was justly punished." The servant? they were sorry for her. Denise, who, after evading the wiles of the prosecution, did not allow herself to make an answer at the trial until she had reflected a long while upon what she should say, aroused the keenest interest. She was transformed into a figure comparable, in some sense, to Jeanie Deans, whose grace and modesty, religious principles and beauty, she possessed. Jean-François Tascheron continued, therefore, to monopolize the interest, not of the town alone, but of the whole department, and some romantic women openly accorded him their admiration.

"If there is a passion for a woman of higher station than himself behind all this," they said, "that man certainly is no ordinary man. You will see that he will die bravely!"

The question: "Will he speak or will he not?" gave rise to wagers. Since the frantic outbreak with which he had received his sentence, and which might have been fatal to some of the court officials or spectators had it not been for the presence of the gendarmes, the criminal threatened all who approached him, indiscriminately, and with the fury of a wild beast; the jailer was forced to put a strait-jacket on him as much to prevent his attempting to take his own life, as to avoid the effects of his

frenzy. When he was thus triumphantly rendered incapable of any sort of violence, Tascheron gave vent to his despair in convulsive movements which frightened his keepers, in words and glances which in the Middle Ages would have been attributed to possession by a devil. He was so young that the women were moved to pity touching that life so full of love, which was to be cut short. *The Last Day of a Condemned*, a gloomy elegy, a fruitless argument against the death penalty, that great prop of society, which had appeared a short time before, as if written expressly for the occasion, was the order of the day in all conversations. Lastly, who did not point with his finger to the invisible unknown, standing with her feet bathed in blood, upon the floor of the court-room, as upon a pedestal, torn by horrible agony and compelled to maintain a perfectly tranquil demeanor in her own home? People almost admired that Limousin Medea, with the white breast covering a heart of steel, and the impenetrable mask. Perhaps she was in this one's family or that one's, the sister or the cousin, the wife or daughter of such a one! What terror in the bosom of families! As Napoléon sublimely said, it is especially in the domain of the imagination that the power of the unknown is immeasurable.

As for the hundred thousand francs stolen from Monsieur and Madame des Vanneaulx, which the police had been absolutely unable to find, the criminal's unbroken silence was singularly discomfiting to the prosecution. Monsieur de Granville, who acted

in the place of the procureur-général, then in his seat in the Chamber of Deputies, tried the common method of giving the condemned man reason to hope for commutation of sentence in case of full confession; but when he made his appearance, the criminal greeted him with fierce cries of redoubled violence, with epileptic contortions, and glared at him with eyes flaming with rage and expressing regret at his inability to kill him. The authorities did not call upon the Church for assistance until the last moment. The Des Vanneaulx had been many times to Abbé Pascal, the chaplain of the prison. That priest was not lacking in the peculiar talent required to induce the prisoners to listen to him; he defied, as in duty bound, Tascheron's passionate outbreaks, he tried to interject a few words amid the tempests of that powerful nature in a state of convulsion. But the conflict of that spiritual fatherhood with the whirlwind of those unchained passions crushed and wearied poor Abbé Pascal.

"That man has found his paradise here on earth," said the old man, in an undertone.

Little Madame des Vanneaulx consulted her friends as to whether she should venture to approach the criminal. Monsieur des Vanneaulx talked of a compromise. In his despair, he went to Monsieur de Granville to propose suing for the pardon of his uncle's assassin if he would restore the hundred thousand francs. The avocat-général replied that the king's majesty did not stoop to such compromises. Then the Des Vanneaulx turned to

Tascheron's advocate, and offered him ten per cent. of the amount if he could succeed in recovering it. The advocate was the only man at sight of whom Tascheron did not fly into a passion; the heirs authorized him to offer the criminal another ten per cent., which he could use for the benefit of his family. Despite the incisions which those beavers thus made in their inheritance, and despite his eloquence, the advocate could obtain no concession from his client. The Des Vanneaulx, in their rage, cursed and anathematized the condemned man.

"Not only is he an assassin, but he has no sense of delicacy!" cried Des Vanneaulx, in all seriousness, ignorant of Fualdès's famous lament, when he learned of Abbé Pascal's non-success, and realized that all would be lost by the probable dismissal of the appeal. "What good will our fortune do him where he is going? As for a murder, one can conceive of that, but useless robbery is inconceivable. What times we live in, that society people should be interested in such a cut-throat! There's nothing in his favor."

"He's anything but honorable," said Madame des Vanneaulx.

"But suppose the restitution would compromise his dear friend?" said an old maid.

"We would keep the secret!" cried Monsieur des Vanneaulx.

"You would be guilty of concealing crime," suggested a lawyer.

"Oh! the beggar!" was Monsieur des Vanneaulx's conclusion.

One of the women of Madame Graslin's circle, who laughingly described to her the perplexities of the Des Vanneaulx, a very bright woman, one of those who dream of the ideally beautiful and wish everything to be complete, regretted the frantic conduct of the condemned man; she would have liked him to be cold and calm and dignified.

"Don't you see," Véronique said to her, "that in that way he avoids and baffles all attempts to change his determination? He has become a wild beast for that purpose."

"Besides, he's not a man of refinement," rejoined the exiled Parisian, "he's a workman."

"A man of refinement would soon have made an end of the unknown woman!" replied Madame Graslin.

These events, jumbled together and distorted in salons and domestic circles, commented on in a thousand ways, and dissected by the most skilful tongues in the town, imparted a cruel interest to the execution of the criminal, whose appeal was dismissed by the supreme court two months later. What would be the murderer's attitude in his last moments, boasting as he did that he would make the execution impossible by fighting desperately? Would he speak? would he break his word? who would win the bet? Will you go? will you not go? how is one to go? The location of the place of execution, which spares the culprit the agony of a long ride, restricts the number of fashionable spectators at Limoges. The Palais de Justice, where the prison is, stands at the

corner of Rue du Palais and Rue du Pont-Hérisson. Rue du Palais is continued in a straight line by a short street, Rue de Monte-à-Regret, which leads to Place d'Aîne or des Arènes, where executions take place, to which circumstance the square doubtless owes its name. Thus the distance is short, consequently there are few houses and few windows. What man or woman of the upper class would care to mix with the vulgar crowd who would fill the square?

But that execution, expected from day to day, was postponed from day to day, to the great surprise of the town; and for this reason. The pious resignation of great criminals on their way to their death is one of the triumphs which the Church reserves to itself, and which rarely fail of their effect upon the common herd; the repentance of men condemned to death attests so strongly the power of religious ideas that, aside from any Christian motive, although that should be the principal aim of the Church, the clergy are naturally heart-broken by failure on these conspicuous occasions. In July, 1829, matters were aggravated by party spirit, which envenomed the most trivial details of political life. The liberal party rejoiced to observe the failure on such a public occasion of the "priest party," an expression invented by Montlosier, a royalist who had gone over to the constitutionalists and was drawn on by them further than he intended. Parties, *en masse*, commit infamous deeds which would cover a man with obloquy; and so, when a man personifies them all in the eyes of the mob, he becomes Robespierre, Jeffries,

Laubardemont, expiatory altars, so to speak, upon which all their accomplices secretly hang *ex-votos*. By agreement with the bishop's palace, the prosecuting office delayed the execution, in the hope of finding out those circumstances of the crime which were as yet unknown, no less than of allowing religion to triumph.

However, the power of the prosecuting attorney in that respect was not unlimited, and the sentence must be executed sooner or later. The same liberals who, in a spirit of opposition, looked upon Tascheron as innocent, and who had tried to nullify the sentence of the law, murmured now because that sentence was not executed. Opposition, when it is systematic, is guilty of such contradictions; for, from its standpoint, it is not a question of right or wrong, but of always railing at the government. Thus, early in August, the prosecution's hand was forced by that clamor, often utterly senseless, called public opinion. The date of the execution was announced. In that emergency, Abbé Dutheil took it upon himself to suggest to the bishop one last expedient, the success of which was to introduce in this judicial drama the extraordinary individual who serves to connect all the others, who is the grandest of all the figures in this Scene, and who was destined to lead Madame Graslin, by paths familiar to Providence, to the stage where her virtues shone forth with the greatest brilliancy, where she showed herself a sublime benefactress and an angelic Christian woman.

The episcopal palace at Limoges is situated on a hill beside the Vienne, and its gardens, which are supported by strong walls surrounded by balustrades, descend in terraces, following the natural fall of the ground. The hill is so high that Faubourg Saint-Etienne, on the other bank, seems to lie at the foot of the last terrace. From there the river unfolds itself, either in its length or in its width, according to the direction in which you walk, and always in the midst of a rich panorama. Toward the west, beyond the gardens of the palace, the Vienne rushes upon the town in a graceful curve, skirting Faubourg Saint-Martial. Beyond that faubourg, a short distance, is a pretty country-house called Le Cluzeau, whose shrubbery can be seen from the terraces nearest the river, and, by an effect of perspective, blends with the steeples of the faubourg. Opposite Le Cluzeau is that sloping islet, covered with a growth of poplars, which Véronique in her early youth called Ile de France. To the east, in the distance, lie hills in the shape of an amphitheatre. The loveliness of the location and the noble simplicity of the building make that palace the most notable monument in the town, where the buildings do not arouse admiration either by choice of materials or by architectural merit.

Having long been familiar with the views which commend those gardens to persons who travel in quest of the picturesque, Abbé Dutheil, who was accompanied by Monsieur de Grancour, descended

from terrace to terrace, heedless of the bright red, the orange, and violet tints which the setting sun cast upon the old walls and the balustrades, upon the houses in the faubourg, and the waters of the river. He was in search of the bishop, who was seated at that moment in the corner of the lowest terrace under an arbor of vines, where he had come to eat his dessert, yielding to the charm of the evening.

The poplars on the island seemed to cleave the waters with the lengthened shadows of their branches, already turning yellow, to which the sun gave the appearance of a mass of golden foliage. The beams of the setting sun, reflected diversely by the masses of varying greens, produced a magnificent combination of melancholy tones. In the depths of the valley the Vienne shivered in the faint evening breeze, like a sheet of gold-spangled bubbles, bringing out in relief the flat brown surfaces presented by the roofs of Faubourg Saint-Etienne. The steeples and roofs of Faubourg Saint-Martial, bathed in light, blended with the vines on the trellises. The gentle murmur of a provincial town, half hidden in the curve of the river, the softness of the air, all contributed to plunge the prelate into the tranquil frame of mind insisted upon by all authors who have written upon the digestion; his eyes were fixed mechanically on the right bank of the river, at the spot where the long shadows of the poplars on the island touched, on the Faubourg Saint-Etienne shore, the walls of the field in which the double murder of old Pingret and his servant

had been committed; but when his petty, momentary felicity was interrupted by the difficulties of which his vicars-general reminded him, his looks were filled with impenetrable thoughts. The two priests attributed his distraction to *ennui*, whereas, on the contrary, the prelate saw in the sands of the Vienne the solution of the enigma which the Des Vanneaulx and the officers of the law were then seeking.

"Monseigneur," said Abbé de Grancour, approaching the bishop, "nothing is of any avail, we shall have the sorrow of seeing that unhappy Tascheron die unshriven; he will utter the most horrible imprecations against religion, he will overwhelm poor Abbé Pascal with insults, he will spit upon the crucifix, he will deny everything, even hell."

"He will terrify the people," said Abbé Dutheil. "That great scandal and the horror he will inspire will cover our defeat and our helplessness. And so, as I said to Monsieur de Grancour, on our way hither, this spectacle will send more than one sinner into the bosom of the Church."

Disturbed by these words, the bishop placed the bunch of grapes at which he was picking upon a rustic wooden table, and wiped his fingers, motioning to his two vicars-general to be seated.

"Abbé Pascal is ill," he said, at last.

"He is ill as a result of his last scene at the prison," said Abbé de Grancour. "Except for his indisposition, we should have brought him to explain the difficulties which make it impossible to try

any of the expedients which monseigneur ordered us to try."

"The condemned man sings obscene songs at the top of his voice as soon as he sees one of us, and drowns the words we try to say to him," said a young priest who was seated near the bishop.

This young man, who had a charming face, rested his right elbow on the table, his white hand played carelessly with the bunches of grapes from which he selected the ripest fruit with the ease and familiarity of a member of the household or a favorite. He was the younger brother of the Comte de Rastignac, attached by family ties and by ties of affection to the Bishop of Limoges, and was at once a member of his household and his favorite. In consideration of the pecuniary reasons which caused the young man to enter the Church, the bishop had taken him as his private secretary, pending an opportunity for promotion. Abbé Gabriel bore a name which marked him out for the most exalted dignities of the Church.

"Have you been there, my son?" said the bishop.

"Yes, monseigneur; as soon as I appeared, the wretch poured forth the most disgusting insults to you and myself; he acted in such a way as to make it impossible for a priest to remain in his presence. Will monseigneur allow me to give him some advice?"

"Let us listen to the wisdom which God sometimes puts in the mouths of children," said the bishop, with a smile.

"Did He not make Balaam's ass speak?" replied the young Abbé de Rastignac, quickly.

"According to some commentators, she had none too clear an idea of what she was saying," laughed the bishop.

The two vicars-general smiled; in the first place, the jest was monseigneur's; and then it was mildly sarcastic at the expense of the young abbé, of whom the dignitaries and ambitious priests who surrounded the prelate were jealous.

"My advice," said the young abbé, "would be to request Monsieur de Granville to postpone the execution once more. When the condemned man knows that he owes a reprieve for several days to our intercession, perhaps he will make a pretence of listening to us, and if he once listens to us—"

"He will persist in his conduct, when he sees the advantages it affords him," said the bishop, interrupting his favorite.—"Messieurs," he continued, after a moment's silence, "does the town know of these details?"

"Where is the house in which they are not discussed?" said Abbé de Grancour. "The state to which his last effort has brought good Abbé Pascal is the one subject of conversation at this moment."

"When is Tascheron to be executed?" inquired the bishop.

"To-morrow, market-day," replied Monsieur de Grancour.

"Messieurs, religion must never accept the underhand!" cried the bishop. "The more public attention is aroused by this affair, the more I desire to

obtain a notorious triumph. The Church is face to face with a difficult crisis. We are compelled to perform miracles in a manufacturing town, where the spirit of sedition against religious and monarchical doctrines has put forth deep roots, where the idea of close scrutiny, born of Protestantism and to-day known as Liberalism, with liberty to adopt another name to-morrow, extends to everything. Go, messieurs, to Monsieur de Granville; he is with us; tell him that we request a reprieve for a few days. I will go to see this unhappy man."

"You, monseigneur!" said Abbé de Rastignac. "If you fail, will you not have imperilled too many things? You should not go unless you are sure of success."

"If monseigneur will permit me to give my opinion," said Abbé Dutheil, "I think that I shall be able to suggest a method of assuring the triumph of the religion in this deplorable affair."

The prelate replied with a somewhat cold sign of assent, which showed how little credit the vicar-general had with him.

"If any man can exert authority over that rebellious soul and bring it back to God," continued Abbé Dutheil, "that man is the curé of the village where he was born, Monsieur Bonnet."

"One of your protégés," observed the bishop.

"Monseigneur, Monsieur le Curé Bonnet is one of those men who protect themselves, both by their militant virtues and by their works in furtherance of the gospel."

That reply, so modest and so simple, was greeted by a silence that would have embarrassed any other than Abbé Dutheil; it spoke of unappreciated people, and the three priests chose to see in it one of those humble but irreproachable, skilfully polished sarcasms characteristic of ecclesiastics, who are accustomed to observe the strictest rules, while saying what they wish to say. But it was nothing of the sort; Abbé Dutheil never thought of himself.

"I have heard of Saint Aristides too long," replied the bishop, with a smile. "If I should leave that light under a bushel, it would be either injustice or prejudice on my part. Your liberals extol your Monsieur Bonnet as if he belonged to their party, and I wish to pass judgment myself upon this rural apostle. Go to the procureur-général, messieurs, and ask in my name for a reprieve; I will await his reply before sending our dear Abbé Gabriel to Montégnac, whence he will bring this holy man to us. We will place His Beatitude in a position to perform miracles."

As he listened to that harangue of the nobleman prelate, Abbé Dutheil blushed; but he did not choose to take umbrage at what was offensive to himself in his words. The two vicars-general saluted in silence, and left the bishop with his favorite.

"The secrets of the confession which we seek to obtain are, doubtless, buried there," said the bishop to his young abbé, pointing to the shadows of the poplars where they fell upon an isolated house between the islet and Faubourg Saint-Etienne.

"I have always thought so," replied Gabriel.

"I am not a magistrate, I do not choose to be a spy; but, if I had been a magistrate, I would have learned the name of the woman who trembles at every sound, at every word, and whose brow, nevertheless, must remain calm and untroubled on pain of accompanying the condemned man to the scaffold. But she has nothing to fear; I have seen the man, he will carry the secret of his fervent love with him into the darkness."

"Little fox!" said the bishop, pulling the secretary's ear, and pointing to a spot between the island and Faubourg Saint-Etienne, upon which the last red flame of the setting sun shone brightly, and upon which the young priest's eyes were fixed. "The law should have searched there, eh?"

"I went to see the criminal to try the effect of my suspicions upon him; but he is guarded by spies; by speaking aloud, I should have compromised the person for whom he is dying."

"Let us hold our peace," said the bishop, "we are not the officers of man's law. One head is enough. Besides, this secret will come to the Church sooner or later."

The perspicacity which the habit of meditation imparts to priests is far superior to that of prosecuting attorneys and police. By dint of contemplating the scene of the crime from the summit of their terraces, the prelate and his secretary had, in truth, at last discovered details still unknown, despite the investigations of the examining magistrate and the trial in the Assize court.

Monsieur de Granville was playing whist at Madame Graslin's, and they had to await his return; his decision was not known at the bishop's palace until toward midnight. Abbé Gabriel, to whom the bishop lent his carriage, started for Montégnac about two in the morning. That village, about nine leagues from Limoges, lies in that part of the Limousin which skirts the mountains of La Corrèze and adjoins La Creuse. The young abbé left Limoges in the grasp of all the passions aroused by the spectacle promised for the following day, which was, however, to disappoint it once more.

III

THE CURÉ OF MONTÉGNAC

Priests and devotees have a tendency to observe the strictest legal rules in the matter of expenditure. Is it poverty? Is it a result of the selfishness to which their isolation condemns them and which facilitates the inclination of mankind to avarice? Is it a result of the parsimony compelled by the exercise of charity? Each case presents a different explanation. Concealed often beneath an attractive amiability, often, too, entirely sincere, this repugnance to putting the hand in the pocket is especially noticeable in travelling. Gabriel de Rastignac, the prettiest youth whom the altars had seen for a long time bending his head beneath their tabernacles, gave only thirty sous *pourboire* to the postilions; consequently, his progress was slow. Postilions treat with great respect the bishops who only double their wages, but they do no damage to the episcopal carriage for fear of incurring disgrace. Abbé Gabriel, who was travelling alone for the first time, said mildly at every station:

"Pray drive faster, Messieurs les Postillons!"

"We don't play with the whip," replied an old postilion, "unless passengers play with their thumbs!"

The young abbé buried himself in the corner of the carriage, unable to understand that reply. As a means of distraction, he studied the country he was passing through, and he walked up several of the hills over which the road from Bordeaux to Lyon winds.

Five leagues from Limoges, the sunny sloping shores of the Vienne, and the pleasant fields of the Limousin, which remind one of Switzerland in some places, especially at Saint-Léonard, are succeeded by a desolate and depressing region. There are vast, untilled fields, and plains without grass or horses, but bordered on the horizon by the heights of La Corrèze. Those mountains present to the traveller's eye neither the perpendicular cliffs of the Alps and their sublime rents and fissures, nor the gorges, warm with color, and desolate peaks of the Apennines, nor the grandeur of the Pyrenees; their undulations, due to the movement of the waters, indicate the subsidence of the great catastrophe, and the tranquillity with which the liquid masses withdrew. This aspect of the country, common to most of the hilly regions in France, has contributed, perhaps, as much as the climate to earn for it the epithet of *mild*, which Europe has confirmed. If that contrast between the uninteresting landscapes of the Limousin and those of La Marche and Auvergne presents to the thinker and the poet who pass that

way images of the infinite, the terror of some minds; if it inclines to revive the woman who is suffering from *ennui* in her carriage,—to the native that region is wild and rough and devoid of resource. The soil of those vast grayish plains is ungrateful. The proximity of a capital alone could duplicate the miracle that has been wrought in Brie during the past two centuries. But there are none of those great estates which sometimes give life to those deserts where the husbandman sees only waste places, where civilization wrings its hands, where the tourist finds neither inns nor that which most delights him, the picturesque. Elevated minds do not dislike those moors, essential shadows in the vast tableau of nature. Within a short time, Cooper, that melancholy genius, has magnificently developed the poetic character of these solitudes, in *The Prairie.* These tracts, neglected by plant life, covered with unfruitful mineral rubbish, with smooth stones and dead earth, are challenges to civilization. France should accept the solution of these difficulties as the English accept those presented by Scotland, where their patient, their heroic toil has transformed the barrenest moors into productive farms. If left in their primitive wild state, these social fallow-lands engender discouragement, sloth, weakness from lack of sustenance, and crime when want speaks too loud.

These few words tell the past history of Montégnac. What was to be done with a vast untilled field, neglected by the government, abandoned by the

nobility, cursed by the manufacturing class? Make war on society, which does not understand its duties! And so the people of Montégnac formerly subsisted by theft and murder, as the Scotch of the Highlands used to do. From the very aspect of the country, the thinking man can readily imagine why, twenty years earlier, the people of that village were at war with society. That great plateau, bounded on one side by the valley of the Vienne, on the other by the pretty dales of La Marche and by Auvergne, and isolated by the mountains of La Corrèze, resembles, agriculture aside, the plateau of La Beauce, which separates the basin of the Loire from the basin of the Seine, or those of Touraine and Berri and so many others which are like facets on the surface of France and numerous enough to occupy the thoughts of the greatest administrators. It is a most extraordinary thing that people should complain of the constant upward movement of the masses of the people toward the higher social levels, and that a government should discover no remedy for it in a country where statistics tell us that several millions of acres of land are lying fallow, on certain portions of which, as in Berri, for instance, there are seven or eight feet of vegetable mould! Many of these tracts, which would feed whole villages, which would produce immense crops, belong to obstinate communes, which refuse to sell them to speculators in order to retain the right to pasture a few hundred cows there. Upon all this unproductive territory is written the word *Incapacity*. Every

soil has some special sort of fertility. Not arms nor goodwill are lacking, but administrative conscience and talent. In France, up to the present time, these plateaus have been sacrificed to the valleys; the government has given its assistance, has expended its labors there, where its protection was not needed. Most of these unfortunate solitudes lack water, the first principle of all production. The mists which might fertilize that dead, gray soil by discharging their oxides upon it, sweep swiftly by, borne onward by the wind, because of the absence of trees which, everywhere else, check their course and pump from them their nutritious substance. In many places of this sort, to plant would be like preaching the gospel.

Separated from the nearest large town by a distance which was too great for poor folk to travel, and which placed a desert between it and them; having no outlet for their produce if they had produced anything; planted beside an unexploited forest, which provided them with wood and the uncertain sustenance of poaching,—the natives were hard pressed by hunger in winter. As the soil was not suited to the production of grain, the unfortunate creatures had neither cattle nor farming-tools; they lived on chestnuts. Those persons who, while taking a general view, in a museum, of the zoological products of the world, have experienced the indescribable melancholy caused by the sight of the brown tones which characterize the products of Europe, will understand perhaps how great an

influence the sight of those grizzly plains is likely to exert upon one's mental condition, by virtue of the depressing suggestion of barrenness which they constantly present. There is neither freshness nor shade nor contrast, none of the ideas, none of the sights which rejoice the heart. There one would embrace a poor stunted apple-tree as one would a friend.

A departmental road, recently built, diverged from the main road and crossed this plateau. A few leagues away, at the foot of a hill, as its name indicated, lay Montégnac, the chief town of a canton at which one of the arrondissements of Haute-Vienne begin. The hill belongs to Montégnac, which includes mountain and plain within its limits. The commune is a miniature Scotland, with its lowlands and highlands. Behind the hill, at the foot of which lies the village, and distant about a league, rises the first peak of the Corrèze chain. In the interval lies the great forest, called Montégnac forest, which begins on the hill of Montégnac, descends it, fills the valleys and barren hillsides, stripped bare in spots, climbs the mountain and extends to the Aubusson road by a tongue of woodland which comes to an end on a steep bank beside that road. The bank overlooks a gorge through which runs the high-road from Bordeaux to Lyon. Carriages, travellers, and pedestrians had often been stopped in the depths of that dangerous gorge by robbers, whose depredations went unpunished: the location favored their escape; they made their way, by hidden paths, to the inaccessible parts

of the forest. Such a region offered little encouragement to the investigations of the officers of the law. No one passed that way. Without circulation, there can be neither commerce, nor manufactures, nor exchange of ideas, nor wealth of any sort; the marvellous physical achievements of civilization are always the result of an application of primitive ideas. Thought is always the point of departure and the point of arrival of every society. The history of Montégnac affords a proof of that axiom of social science. When the government was able to give its attention to the urgent, material needs of the district, it felled the tongue of forest, and stationed there a detachment of gendarmes, who escorted vehicles and travellers over the two stages; but, to the shame of the gendarmerie, it was the word and not the sword, Bonnet the curé and not Brigadier Chervin, who won that civil battle by changing the moral character of the people. That priest, impelled by a religious affection for that impoverished country-side, tried to regenerate it and accomplished his object.

After travelling about an hour across those bare plains, alternately stony and dusty, where the partridges went their way undisturbed in flocks, making the familiar dull and heavy whirr with their wings, as they rose at the approach of the carriage, Abbé Gabriel, like all travellers who have taken that journey, felt a thrill of pleasure as he caught sight of the roofs of the village. At the entrance to Montégnac is one of those curious relay stations which

are seen only in France. Its sign consists of an oak board whereon some ambitious postilion has written the words *Pauste o chevos—Poste à chevaux*—in very black ink, and nailed it with four nails over the door of a wretched stable in which there is no horse. The door, which is almost always open, has for a threshold a plank set on its edge to keep the rain-water from flooding the floor of the stable, which is lower than the road. The despondent traveller spies mildewed, worn-out, mended harnesses, ready to give way at the first pull of the horses. The horses are ploughing or in the hayfield, always somewhere else than in the stable. If they do happen to be in the stable, they are feeding; if they have had their feed, the postilion is at his aunt's or his cousin's; he is putting in hay or he is asleep; no one knows where he is, you must wait until someone has hunted him up, and he does not come until he has finished what he is doing; when he finally arrives, an interminable time passes before he has found his jacket or his whip, or harnessed his horses. A stout, good-humored woman, standing on the steps of the house, is more annoyed than the traveller, and, to prevent him from giving way to his temper, moves about more actively than the horses will ever do. She is the postmistress, whose husband is at work in the fields.

Monseigneur's favorite left his carriage in front of a stable of that description, the walls of which resembled a map, while its thatched roof, blossoming like a flower-bed, sagged under the weight of

vegetation upon it. After requesting the mistress to make everything ready for his departure, which would take place in an hour, he inquired the way to the rectory; the good woman pointed to a lane between two houses, which led to the church, and said that the rectory was close by.

While the young abbé climbed the stony path, enclosed by hedges, the postmistress questioned the postilion. All the way from Limoges, each postilion, on arriving at a relay station, had told his confrère who was to continue the journey, of the conjectures afloat at the bishop's palace, as promulgated by the postilion from the capital. So that, while the people at Limoges were leaving their beds and talking about the impending execution of Père Pingret's assassin, the country people all along the road told of the innocent man's pardon, obtained by the bishop, and chattered about the alleged errors of human justice. If Jean-François should be executed later, perhaps he would be regarded as a martyr.

After walking a few steps up the path, reddened by the autumn leaves and black with wild raspberries and plums, Abbé Gabriel turned in obedience to the instinctive impulse which leads us all to look closely at places which we visit for the first time,—a sort of inborn physical curiosity which we share with horses and dogs. The situation of Montégnac was explained to him by several streams which ran down the hill, and by a small river skirted by the departmental road which connects the village with the prefecture. Like all the villages

on that plateau, Montégnac is built of earth dried in the sun and made into blocks. After a fire, a building might be found built of brick. The roofs are of thatch. Everything indicated the prevalence of poverty. Beside the road, before reaching the village, were several fields of buckwheat, radishes, and potatoes, rescued from the moor. On the slope of the hill he descried some irrigated fields, in which are raised the famous Limousin horses, said to have been a legacy from the Arabs when they descended from the Pyrenees into France, to fall, between Poitiers and Tours, under the battle-axes of the Franks commanded by Charles Martel. The heights had a withered look. Scorched, reddish, glistening spots denoted the arid land where the chestnut flourishes. The water, carefully diverted for purposes of irrigation, gave life only to the fields, bordered by chestnut-trees and surrounded by hedges, where the fine, sweet grass grew, short and sparse, which produces that breed of fine-limbed, delicate horses, unable to endure great fatigue, but showy, excellent for use in the district in which they are born, and likely to deteriorate when transplanted. Some mulberry-trees, recently imported, indicated a purpose to cultivate the silk-worm.

Like most villages the world over, Montégnac had but a single street, which was a continuation of the departmental road. But there were an upper and a lower Montégnac, each divided by lanes running into the street at right angles. A row of houses on the brow of the hill presented the lively spectacle of

terraced gardens; to reach them from the street one must ascend several steps; some of the flights were of earth, others of loose stones; and here and there the scene was enlivened by old women, who sat spinning or watching children, and kept up a conversation between upper and lower Montégnac, speaking across the street, ordinarily perfectly quiet, and despatching news swiftly from one end of the village to the other. The gardens, full of fruit-trees, cabbages, onions, and other vegetables, all had beehives along their terraces. Then there was another row of houses with gardens overhanging the river, whose course was marked by superb juniper-trees, and by those fruit-trees that love damp soil; this last row was parallel to the other; some of the houses, like the post-house, were in a hollow, and this encouraged the establishment of the weaving industry; almost all of them were shaded by walnuts, the tree of rich soil. In that direction, at the opposite end of the village from the great plain, was a house larger and in better condition than the others, and around it was a group of houses equally well kept. This hamlet, separated from the village by its gardens, was called LES TASCHERONS, a name which it bears to this day. The commune was a small affair in itself, but it included some thirty scattered farms. In the valley, in the direction of the river, were thickets like those of La Marche and Berri, indicating the course of small streams and drawing a line of green fringe around the commune, dropped there like a ship in mid-ocean.

When a house, an estate, a village, a province, have passed from a deplorable to a satisfactory state, although they have attained neither splendor nor even wealth, the new life seems so natural to the living creatures there, that the spectator can never conceive at first glance the tremendous efforts, infinite in their minuteness, grand in their persistence, the toil buried in the foundations, the forgotten labors upon which the first changes rest. So it was that this spectacle did not seem extraordinary to the young abbé, when he cast an all-embracing glance upon that attractive landscape. He knew nothing of the condition of the country before the arrival of the curé Bonnet. He walked on up the path a few steps, and soon discovered, some five or six hundred feet above the gardens of the houses of upper Montégnac, the church and the rectory, which he had seen at first in the distance, confusedly mingled with the imposing ruins and enveloped by the climbing plants of the old château of Montégnac, one of the residences of the house of Navarreins in the twelfth century. The rectory, which was evidently built originally for a head-keeper or a steward, attracted attention by a long, high terrace planted with lindens, whence the eye commanded a view of the whole surrounding country. The stairs leading to this terrace and the walls that supported it were of an antiquity evidenced by the ravages of time. The stones of the staircase, displaced by the imperceptible but continuous force of vegetation, made room for tall weeds and wild plants. The shallow moss that

clings to rocks had spread its dragon-green carpet over the top of each stair. The numerous species of pellitories, the camomile, the maiden-hair, grew in abundant variegated clumps in the loopholes in the wall, which was badly cracked notwithstanding its thickness. Botany had spread there the loveliest carpet of delicate ferns, violet snap-dragon with golden pistils, blue bugloss and brown cryptogams, so that the stone seemed to be a mere accessory and appeared through that fresh, green tapestry only at rare intervals. On the terrace was a flower-garden, with geometrical figures described by borders of box, and overlooked by the curé's house, above which was the whitish mass of the cliff, with here and there a sickly tree, drooping like a bird's tail-feathers. The ruins of the castle overlooked the church and the house.

This rectory, constructed of small stones and mortar, had one floor above the ground-floor, surmounted by a vast sloping roof with two gables, beneath which were garret chambers, untenanted, doubtless, in view of the dilapidated condition of the windows. The ground-floor consisted of two rooms separated by a corridor, at the end of which was a wooden staircase giving access to the first floor, which also consisted of two rooms. A small kitchen adjoined the building on the yard side, where there were a stable and cow-shed, utterly deserted and useless. The kitchen garden lay between the house and the church. A half-ruined gallery led from the rectory to the sacristy. When the young abbé saw the four windows

with lead sashes, the brown, mossy walls, the unpainted door split like a bundle of matches,—far from being impressed by the admirable simplicity of those details, by the graceful beauty of the vegetation on the roof, the rotten window-sills and the cracks from which fantastic climbing plants emerged, by the vines with their spiral tendrils and tiny bunches of grapes peeping in through the windows as if to suggest joyous thoughts, he was very happy in the thought that he was a prospective bishop rather than a village curé. That house, always open, seemed to belong to one and all.

Abbé Gabriel entered the room which communicated with the kitchen and found it but poorly furnished: an old oak table with four twisted legs, an easy-chair with upholstered seat, wooden chairs, an old chest for a sideboard. There was no one in the kitchen except a cat, which disclosed the presence of a woman in the household. The other room served as a salon. As he glanced around, the young priest saw armchairs in natural wood with upholstered seats. The wainscoting and the timbers in the ceiling were chestnut and as black as ebony. There was a clock in a green case with flowers painted on it, a table covered with a worn green cloth, a few common chairs, and upon the mantel two candlesticks, with a child Jesus in wax between, under its glass globe. The fireplace, surrounded by a wooden mantel with coarse carvings, was hidden by a paper fireboard, the subject being the Good Shepherd with his ewe-lamb on his shoulder,

doubtless a gift from the daughter of the mayor or of the justice of the peace, in acknowledgment of the pains bestowed upon her education. The pitiful condition of the house made one's heart ache: the walls, once whitewashed, were discolored in spots and marred by constant rubbing to the height of a man's head; the staircase, with its wooden stairs and ungraceful banisters, although spotlessly clean, seemed as if it would shake under your feet.

At the rear, opposite the entrance-door, another door, opening into the kitchen garden, enabled Abbé de Rastignac to see the small size of that garden, enclosed as if by the wall of a fortress cut from the white, crumbling stone of the mountain, against which were rich espaliers, and long, ill-kept trellises, all the foliage being devoured by insects. He retraced his steps, and walked through the paths in the first garden, where the magnificent spectacle of the valley beyond the village lay spread before his eyes, a veritable oasis on the edge of vast plains which, veiled as they were by the light morning mists, resembled a calm sea. Behind, on the one hand, were the vast shadows of the bronze-hued forest, and on the other the church, and the ruins of the château, perched on the mountain side, but standing out in bold relief against the blue sky. As he walked along, making the gravel of the star-shaped, round, and diamond-shaped paths crunch beneath his feet, Gabriel looked alternately at the village, where the natives, standing about in groups, were already examining him, at the green valley

with its thorn-lined roads, its willow-bordered stream, so in contrast to the boundless expanse of the plains; thereupon he was seized by emotions which changed the current of his thoughts: he admired the tranquillity of that spot, he underwent the influence of that pure air, of the peace inspired by the revelation of a life reduced to the simplicity of biblical times; he had a confused idea of the beauties of that rectory, whither he returned to examine its details with serious interest. A little girl, evidently left in charge of the house, but engaged in pilfering in the garden, heard the footsteps of a man with squeaking shoes on the great square tiles which formed the floor of the two lower rooms: she appeared. Abashed at being surprised with fruit in her hand and between her teeth, she made no reply to the handsome, elegant young abbé's questions. The little one had never dreamed that there could be such an abbé, resplendent in fine linen faultlessly neat, and dressed in fine black broadcloth without a spot or a crease.

"Monsieur Bonnet?" she said at last; "Monsieur Bonnet's saying mass and Mademoiselle Ursule's at church."

Abbé Gabriel had not noticed the gallery connecting the rectory with the church, so he went back to the path in order to enter the church by the principal door. That species of lean-to porch was on the village side; it was reached by worn, disjointed stone steps and overlooked a square gullied out by the rain and embellished with the great elms which

were ordered to be planted by the Protestant Sully. The church, one of the poorest in France, where there are many very poor ones, resembled those huge barns which have a roof overhanging the door and supported by brick or wooden pillars. Built of small stones and mortar, like the curé's house, flanked by a square bell-tower without a spire, and covered with great round tiles, that church had for exterior decorations the richest creations of sculpture, made richer by light and shade, retouched and massed and colored by Nature, that understands art as well as Michael Angelo. On two sides the ivy hugged the walls with its nervous branches, displaying through its foliage as many veins as are visible upon an *écorché*. That cloak, lent by time to cover the wounds it had made, was sprinkled with autumn flowers born in the crevices, and gave shelter to singing birds. The rose-window, above the awning of the porch, was enveloped in blue bell-flowers, like the first page of a richly painted missal. The side next the rectory, with a northern exposure, was less bright with flowers, the gray and red wall could be seen there in great patches which the moss did not cover; but the other side and the apse, which were surrounded by the cemetery, were bright with resplendent and varied blossoms. A few trees, among others an almond-tree, one of the emblems of hope, had taken root in the cracks. Two gigantic pines, standing close against the apse, served as lightning-rods. The cemetery, surrounded by a low ruined wall,

which was kept about waist-high by its own débris, had for ornament an iron cross set in a socket, which was dressed with consecrated box at Easter, in obedience to one of those touching Christian thoughts which are forgotten in cities. The village curé is the only priest who says to his dead on the day of the resurrection: "You will live again in joy!" A few rotting crosses marked the grass-covered mounds here and there.

The interior harmonized perfectly with the poetical neglect of that humble exterior, whose only splendor was furnished by time, charitable for once. Within, the eye was first attracted by the ceiling, sheathed in chestnut to which age had imparted the richest tones of the old woods of Europe, and which was supported, at equal intervals, by stout columns resting on transverse timbers. The four whitewashed walls were without any decoration. Poverty made the parish unwittingly iconoclastic. The church had a tile floor and was supplied with benches and lighted by four gothic windows, on the sides, with lead sashes. The altar, which was in the shape of a tomb, had for ornament a large crucifix above a walnut tabernacle, embellished with some clean and highly polished mouldings, with eight cheap wooden taper-holders painted white, and with two vases filled with artificial flowers, which a broker's porter would have scorned, but with which God was content. The lamp of the sanctuary was a night-light placed in what was once a portable holy-water vessel in silvered copper, suspended by silk cords which

came from some demolished château. The baptismal fonts were of wood, as were the pulpit, and a sort of cage for the church-wardens, the patricians of the village. An altar of the Virgin held up to the public admiration two colored lithographs, framed in small gilt frames. It was painted white, decorated with artificial flowers in vases of gilded wood, and covered with an altar-cloth of cheap, rusty lace, hanging in festoons. At the rear of the church, a long window veiled by a red calico curtain produced a wonderful effect. That rich cloak of deep color cast a reddish tinge upon the whitewashed walls: it was as if a divine thought shone from the altar and embraced the poor nave to warm it. The corridor leading to the sacristy displayed upon one of its walls the patron saint of the village, a great John the Baptist with his lamb, carved from wood and shockingly painted.

Notwithstanding its poor appearance, the church did not lack the pleasant harmonies which delight noble souls, and which bright colors bring out in such bold relief. The rich brown tones of the woodwork set off to admiration the pure white of the walls, and blended perfectly with the triumphal dark-red flush cast upon the apse. That severe trinity of colors recalled the great thought of Catholicism. If the first sensation at sight of that poor house of God was one of surprise, it was succeeded by admiration mingled with pity: did it not express the poverty of the country round about? was it not in accord with the artless simplicity of the rectory?

It was clean, moreover, and well looked to. The air was filled, as it were, with a perfume of rustic virtues; nothing indicated neglect. Although rustic and simple, it was inhabited by prayer, it had a soul; one felt that it was so without understanding how.

Abbé Gabriel, in order not to disturb the meditations of two groups on the upper benches, glided softly to a place beside the principal altar, which was separated from the nave, just where the lamp hung down, by a rail of coarse workmanship, also made of chestnut, and covered with the cloth intended for the communion. On each side of the nave, a score or more of peasants, men and women, absorbed in the most fervent prayer, paid no heed to the stranger as he walked up the narrow passage between the two rows of benches. When he reached a point under the lamp, from which he could see the two small naves which represented the branches of the cross, and one of which led to the sacristy, the other to the cemetery, Abbé Gabriel noticed, on the cemetery side, a family dressed in black and kneeling on the floor; there were no benches in those two portions of the church. The young abbé prostrated himself on the step leading to the rail that separated the choir from the nave, and began to pray, glancing obliquely meanwhile at that spectacle, which was soon made clear to him. The Gospel was read. The curé laid aside his chasuble and stepped down from the altar to go to the rail. The young abbé, anticipating that movement, drew back against the wall before

Monsieur Bonnet could see him. The clock struck ten.

"My brethren," said the curé, in a voice that trembled with emotion, "at this very moment a child of this parish is about to pay his debt to the laws of mankind by undergoing the last punishment; we offer the blessed sacrifice of the mass for the repose of his soul. Let us unite our prayers in order that we may prevail upon God not to abandon that child in his last moments, and that his repentance may procure for him in heaven the pardon that has been denied him on earth. The downfall of that unhappy man, one of those upon whom we had relied with the greatest assurance to set a worthy example, can be attributed only to lack of knowledge of the principles of religion—"

The curé was interrupted by sobs from the family in mourning, in whom the young priest, by reason of their excessive grief, recognized the Tascheron family, although he had never seen any of them. First, there were two old people close against the wall, seventy years of age at least, their faces tanned like Florentine bronze, and seamed with deep, motionless wrinkles. These two, standing stoically there in their patched clothes, like statues, were evidently the condemned man's grandfather and grandmother. Their red, glassy eyes seemed to weep blood; their arms trembled so that the staves upon which they leaned made a slight noise on the floor. After them were the father and mother, weeping bitterly, their faces hidden in their

handkerchiefs. Near by these four heads of the family knelt two married sisters, accompanied by their husbands. Then three sons, dazed with grief. Five little kneeling children, the eldest of them only seven, of course did not understand what the matter was: they looked and listened with the apparently torpid curiosity characteristic of the peasant, which is in reality keen observation of material things carried to its highest development. Lastly, there was the poor girl who had been imprisoned at the desire of the authorities, Denise, that martyr to her sisterly love, who listened with an air that suggested aberration and incredulity at once. In her view her brother could not die. She represented admirably that one of the three Marys who did not believe in Christ's death, even while sharing its agony. Pale, with dry eyes, like those of one who has had little sleep, her fresh bloom was withered less by working in the fields than by grief; but she had still a country-girl's beauty, full, well-rounded outlines, fine red arms, a round face, bright eyes, lighted at that moment by the gleam of despair. At several points below the neck, the firm, white flesh which the sun had not bronzed announced a rich carnation, a concealed whiteness.

The two married daughters were weeping; their husbands, patient farmers, were grave and serious. The three boys, profoundly sad, kept their eyes fixed on the ground. In that lamentable picture of resignation and hopeless grief, only Denise and her mother showed any symptoms of revolt. The other

natives made themselves sharers in the affliction of that family by a sincere and pious sympathy, which imparted to all their faces the same expression, and which became downright terror, when the few sentences uttered by the curé brought home to their minds the fact that the knife was falling at that moment upon the head of the young man, whom they had all known since his birth, and had looked upon as incapable, beyond all question, of committing a crime. The sobs that interrupted the simple and brief exhortation of the priest to his flock disturbed him to such a point that he at once brought it to an end, calling upon them to pray fervently.

Although that spectacle was not of a nature to surprise a priest, Gabriel de Rastignac was too young not to be deeply touched. He had never yet put in practice the humble virtues of the priest, he knew that he was destined for higher things, that it was not for him to stand in all the social breaches where the heart bleeds at sight of the miseries with which they are filled; his mission was that of the upper clergy, who keep alive the spirit of sacrifice, represent the lofty intelligence of the Church, and on brilliant occasions display those same virtues upon a more extensive stage, like the illustrious bishops of Marseilles and Meaux, like the archbishops of Arles and Cambrai. That little assemblage of country people weeping and praying for the man who, they supposed, was being led out to execution in a great public square, before thousands of people gathered from all parts to add to the punishment by the

immensity of the shame; that feeble counterpoise of sympathy and prayer opposed to that vast assemblage of savage curiosities and deserved maledictions,—was of a nature to touch the hardest heart, especially in that poor church. Abbé Gabriel was tempted to go to the Tascherons and say: "Your son, your brother, has obtained a reprieve!" but he was afraid of disturbing the mass; moreover, he knew that the reprieve would not prevent the execution. Instead of following the service, he was irresistibly impelled to watch the pastor to whom they looked to perform the miracle of converting the criminal.

Gabriel de Rastignac had drawn a mental picture of Monsieur Bonnet, based upon the appearance of the rectory: a short, stout man, with a strong, red face, a rough, hard-working, semi-peasant, tanned by the sun. Far from such being the case, the abbé found himself face to face with his equal. Short of stature and in appearance far from strong, Monsieur Bonnet impressed one at first sight by the rapt countenance we imagine the apostles to have had: an almost triangular face, beginning above with a broad, wrinkled forehead, and extending from the temples to the point of the chin in two gaunt lines drawn by the hollow cheeks. In that face, of a sickly yellow tinge, like the wax in a taper, gleamed two blue eyes, luminous with faith, burning with intense hope. It was divided in two equal parts by a long, thin, straight nose with open nostrils, beneath which was a large mouth with prominent lips,

which talked always, even when closed, and from which came one of those voices which go to the heart. The chestnut hair, thin and fine and combed smoothly, denoted a weak constitution, sustained only by sober living. All that man's strength lay in his will. Such were his distinguishing features. His short hands would have indicated in any other a tendency toward sensual pleasures; perhaps he had, like Socrates, conquered his evil thoughts. He was so thin as to be ungraceful: his shoulder-blades were too prominent, he looked knock-kneed. His chest, over-developed compared with his limbs, gave him the appearance of a hunchback without the hunch. Taken all in all, he was likely to produce an unpleasant impression. Only those to whom the miracles of thought and faith and art are known could admire that flashing martyr's glance, that pallor born of constancy, that voice of love which distinguished the curé Bonnet. That man, worthy of the early days of the Church, a type that has no existence to-day save in the pictures of the sixteenth century and the pages of the Martyrology, was stamped with the seal of human grandeur, which most nearly approaches divine grandeur, with the conviction which embellishes the most ordinary faces by the indefinable touch it imparts to them, and which spreads a warm, golden tinge over the faces of men whose lives are devoted to any cult, just as it illumines the face of a woman glorified by an unselfish passion. Conviction is the human will in its highest development. Effect and cause at once,

it makes an impression on the least impressionable minds, it is a sort of mute eloquence that lays hold of the masses.

As he stepped down from the altar, the curé's eyes met Abbé Gabriel's; he recognized him, and when the bishop's secretary appeared in the sacristy, Ursule, who had received her orders from her master, was there alone, and requested the young abbé to follow her.

"Monsieur," said Ursule, a female of canonical age, as she escorted Abbé de Rastignac through the gallery into the garden, "Monsieur le Curé told me to ask you if you had breakfasted. You must have started from Limoges very early to be here at ten o'clock, so I will go and prepare everything for breakfast. Monsieur l'Abbé will not find such a table as monseigneur's here, but we will do our best. Monsieur Bonnet will soon be back, he has gone to comfort those poor people—the Taschérons. This is the day when their son is to meet with a horrible accident—"

"But where do those poor creatures live?" said Abbé Gabriel, at last. "I am to take Monsieur Bonnet back with me to Limoges instantly, by monseigneur's order. The unhappy man will not be executed to-day, monseigneur has obtained a reprieve—"

"Ah!" said Ursule, whose tongue itched to go out and spread that piece of news, "monsieur will have time to go and carry them that consolation while I am preparing breakfast; the Taschérons' house is

at the end of the village. Follow the path that runs at the foot of the terrace; it will take you there."

When Ursule had watched Abbé Gabriel out of sight, she went down to spread the news in the village, while procuring the necessary materials for the breakfast.

The curé had been abruptly informed at the church of a desperate resolution to which the Taschérons had been led by the dismissal of the appeal. Those worthy people proposed to leave the province, and were to receive that morning the price of their property, sold in anticipation of that step. The sale had necessitated delays and formalities unforeseen by them. Being compelled to remain in the neighborhood after Jean-François's conviction, each day had been to them a bitter cup to drink. The plan they had carried out so mysteriously did not transpire until the day preceding that on which the execution was to take place. The Taschérons had believed that they would be able to leave before that fatal day; but the purchaser of their property was a stranger to the canton, a man from La Corrèze, who cared nothing for their reasons for wishing to be gone, and who had been delayed, too, in calling in his funds. Thus the family was obliged to face its misery to the end. The feeling that dictated this self-exile was so intense in those simple hearts, unused to compromises with their conscience, that the grandfather and grandmother, the daughters and their husbands, the father and mother, all who bore the name of

Tascheron or were allied to them were leaving the province. The whole commune was grieved by this emigration. The mayor had come to beg the curé not to let the poor people go.

According to the new law, the father is not responsible for the son, and the father's crime leaves no stain on his family. This system, working in harmony with the various emancipations that have done so much to weaken the paternal authority, has brought about the triumph of the individualism that is the bane of modern society. Thus the man who thinks upon the things of the future sees family spirit destroyed where the compilers of the new code have established freedom of will and equality. The family will always be the basis of societies. Necessarily temporary, constantly divided, reconstituted only to be dissolved anew, with no connecting-links between the future and the past, the family of an earlier day no longer exists in France. They who have gone forward with the demolition of the ancient structure have been logical in dividing the family property equally, in diminishing the authority of the father, in making of every child the head of a new family, in suppressing burdensome responsibilities; but is the social State as solidly constructed, with its new laws, not as yet subjected to the test of time, as the monarchy was, notwithstanding its long-standing abuses? In losing the solidarity of the family, society has lost that fundamental force which Montesquieu discovered and called *honor*. It has isolated everything in order to assert its power more firmly,

it has divided everything in order to weaken. It reigns over units, over ciphers heaped together like grains of wheat in a bin. Can general interests ever replace family interests? It is for time to solve that question. Nevertheless, the old law exists, it has taken such deep root that you find it flourishing among the common people. There are still lost corners in the provinces where what is called prejudice subsists, where the family suffers for the crime of one of its children, or of one of its elders. That idea made the province uninhabitable to the Tascherons. Their profound religious faith had led them to the church in the morning: was it possible for them to refrain from participating in the sacrifice offered up to God to beseech Him to inspire in their son the repentance which would ensure him life everlasting? and, must they not say farewell to their village altar? But their plan was consummated. When the curé, who followed them, entered the principal room of their house, he found their bags packed for the journey. The purchaser was waiting with his money. The notary was just drawing up the receipts. In the yard behind the house a carriole stood ready to take the two old people and Jean-François's mother, with the money. The rest of the family intended to set out on foot, after dark.

When the young abbé entered the lower room in which the whole family was assembled, the curé of Montégnac had exhausted all the resources of his eloquence. The two old people, insensible with grief, were sitting on their bags in a corner, gazing

at their old ancestral house, its furniture, and the purchaser, then looking at each other as if to say: "Could we ever have believed that such a thing could happen?" Those old people, who had long since resigned their authority to their son, the criminal's father, had, like aged kings after their abdication, resumed the passive rôle of subjects and children. Tascheron was standing, listening to the pastor, and answering him with monosyllables in an undertone. He was a man of about forty-eight years, with the beautiful face that Titian has given to all his apostles: a face expressive of faith, of serious and sedate uprightness; a stern profile, a nose at right angles to the face, blue eyes, a noble forehead, regular features, stiff, curly black hair, planted with the symmetry that gives attractiveness to faces bronzed by working in the open air. It was easy to see that the curé's arguments were ineffectual against an inflexible will. Denise was leaning against the bread-chest, watching the notary, who was using that article of furniture as a desk and sitting in the grandmother's armchair. The purchaser sat on a chair beside the notary. The two married sisters were laying the cloth and preparing the last meal which the ancestors were to offer and to partake of in their house, in their province, before departing for unknown regions. The men were half-sitting on a great bed covered with green serge. The mother was busy over the fire, making an omelet. The grandchildren filled up the doorway, and the purchaser's family stood outside.

The old smoke-blackened room, with its dark timbers, through the window of which could be seen a carefully-tended garden where all the trees had been planted by those two septuagenarians, harmonized with their concentrated suffering, which could be read in so many varying expressions upon all those faces. The meal was prepared especially for the notary, the purchaser, the children, and the sons-in-law. The father and mother, Denise and her sisters, were too sad at heart to satisfy their hunger. There was a lofty and heart-rending resignation in the fulfilment of these last duties of rustic hospitality. The Tascherons, those men of an antique type, ended as we begin, by doing the honors of their house. That picture, simple yet full of solemnity, met the glance of the bishop's secretary when he arrived to inform the curé of Montégnac of the bishop's purpose.

"This worthy man's son still lives," said Gabriel to the curé.

At those words, plainly heard by all in the silence, the two old people sprang to their feet as if the trumpet had sounded for the last judgment. The mother dropped her frying-pan into the fire. Denise uttered a joyful cry. All the others remained in a state of stupefaction which seemed to turn them to stone.

"Jean-François is pardoned!" suddenly shouted the whole village, the inhabitants having rushed in a body to the Tascheron house. "Monseigneur the bishop has—"

"I knew that he was innocent!" said the mother.

"This won't prevent the trade, will it?" said the purchaser to the notary, who answered with an assuring nod of the head.

Abbé Gabriel became in an instant the cynosure of all eyes; his melancholy expression led some to suspect a misapprehension, and in order not to banish the general joy himself, he went out, followed by the curé, and stood outside to send away the crowd, telling those who were nearest him that the execution was only postponed. Thereupon the uproar was at once replaced by a gloomy silence. When the abbé and the curé returned to the house, there was an expression of heart-rending grief on every face: the silence of the village had been rightly interpreted.

"My friends, Jean-François has not received a pardon," said the young abbé, seeing that the blow had told; "but his frame of mind has so disturbed monseigneur, that he has procured a postponement of your son's last day on earth,—hoping to save him in eternity."

"Then he is alive?" cried Denise.

The young abbé took the curé aside to explain to him the perilous plight in which his parishioner's impiety placed the interests of the religion, and what the bishop expected of him.

"Monseigneur demands my death," replied the curé, "I have already refused the entreaties of this afflicted family to go and assist that unhappy child. The interview, and the spectacle which I should have to witness, would shatter me like a glass. To

every man his work. The weakness of my constitution, or rather the too great sensitiveness of my nervous organism, forbids my exercising those functions of our profession. I have remained a simple village curé, in order to be useful to my fellow-men in the sphere in which I can lead a Christian life. I have reflected long and deeply, hoping to find a way to gratify this virtuous family and to fulfil my duties as pastor to that poor child; but, at the mere thought of entering the criminals' cart with him, at the mere thought of witnessing the fatal preparations, I feel a deathly shudder run through my veins. You would not demand that of a mother, and consider, monsieur, that he was born in the bosom of my poor church—"

"I understand, then, that you refuse to obey monseigneur?" said Abbé Gabriel.

"Monseigneur does not know the condition of my health, he does not know that in my case nature itself forbids—" said Monsieur Bonnet, glancing at the young abbé.

"There are times when, like Belzunce at Marseilles, we ought to dare certain death," Gabriel interrupted.

At that moment the curé felt a hand pulling at his cassock, he heard sobs, and, upon turning around, saw the whole family kneeling. Old and young, large and small, men and women, all were holding out their hands imploringly. When he turned his glowing face upon them, a single cry arose from every throat:

"Save his soul, at least!"

The old grandmother had pulled the hem of his cassock and wet it with her tears.

"I will obey, monsieur—"

As he spoke, the curé was forced to sit down, his legs trembled so. The young secretary described Jean-François's frenzied condition.

"Do you believe," said Abbé Gabriel, in conclusion, "that the sight of his sister would make him waver?"

"Surely, yes," replied the curé.—"Denise, you will go with us."

"And I, too," said the mother.

"No!" cried the father. "That child no longer lives for us, as you know. No one of us will see him."

"Do not prevent his salvation," said the young abbé, "you would be responsible for his soul if you should deny us the means of softening him. At this moment his death may become more harmful in its effects than his life has been."

"She shall go," said the father. "It will be her punishment for having interfered to prevent me whenever I wished to correct her boy!"

Abbé Gabriel and Monsieur Bonnet returned to the rectory, where Denise and her mother were told to come, when the two priests were ready to start for Limoges. As they walked along the path that followed the outskirts of upper Montégnac, the young man was able to scrutinize less superficially than at the church the man so highly extolled by the vicar-general: he was at once

favorably impressed by the simple and dignified manner, by that magical voice, and by words in harmony with the voice. The curé had been but once to the bishop's palace since the prelate had taken Gabriel de Rastignac for his secretary, and had barely caught a glimpse of that favorite destined for a bishopric, but he knew how great his influence was; nevertheless, he bore himself with a dignified urbanity which betrayed his appreciation of the sovereign independence the Church accords to curés in their parishes. The young abbé's sentiments, far from lighting up his face, imprinted a stern expression upon it; it was more than cold, it was freezing. A man capable of transforming the moral character of a whole village must be endowed with some power of observation, must be more or less of a physiognomist; but, even if the curé had possessed nothing more than the science of well-doing, he had just given proof of a rare sensitiveness; he was struck, therefore, by the coldness with which the bishop's secretary received his advances and his civilities. Compelled to attribute that disdain to some secret displeasure, he tried to think how he could have wounded him, wherein his conduct could be considered blameworthy in the eyes of his superiors. There was a moment of embarrassing silence, which Abbé de Rastignac broke by a question overflowing with aristocratic pride:

"You have a very poor church, Monsieur le Curé?"

"It is too small," Monsieur Bonnet replied. "On the great festivals the old men put benches under the porch, the young men stand about in a circle on the square; but it is so perfectly still that those outside can hear my voice."

Gabriel was silent for a moment.

"If the people are so religious, how happens it that you allow the church to remain so bare?" he asked.

"Alas! monsieur, I have not the courage to spend money which will assist the poor. The poor are the church. However, I should not fear a visit from Monseigneur on Corpus Christi day! On that day the poor give all that they have to the Church! Did you not notice, monsieur, the nails driven into the walls at intervals? they are used to hold a sort of trellis made of wire on which the women hang bouquets. The church is then entirely clothed with flowers that retain their bloom until the evening. My poor church, which seems so bare to you, is decked out like a bride, it perfumes the air, the ground is strewn with leaves through which they make a path of rose-leaves for the passage of the Blessed Sacrament. On that day I would not fear a comparison with the splendors of Saint Peter's at Rome. The Holy Father has his gold; I have my flowers: to each his miracle. Ah! monsieur, the village of Montégnac is poor, but it is Catholic. Formerly they robbed travellers here; to-day the traveller may drop a bag full of gold-pieces, he will find it at his home."

"Such a result is your eulogy," said Gabriel.

"It has nothing to do with me," rejoined the curé, blushing, for that sharpened epigram had struck home, "but with God's word, with the consecrated bread."

"Bread that borders on the brown," said Abbé Gabriel, with a smile.

"White bread is suited to the stomachs of none but the rich," replied the curé, modestly.

At that the young abbé grasped Monsieur Bonnet's hands and pressed them cordially.

"Pardon me, Monsieur le Curé," he said, making his peace with him instantly by a glance from his lovely blue eyes which went straight to the curé's heart. "Monseigneur bade me put your patience and your modesty to the test; but I can go no further, for I see already how you have been slandered by the praises of the liberals."

The breakfast was ready: fresh eggs, butter, honey and fruit, coffee and cream, served by Ursule, amid bouquets of flowers, upon a snowy cloth spread upon the old-fashioned table in that old dining-room. The window, which looked on the terrace, was open. The sill was framed by clematis, laden with its white stars with the yellow bunches of curly stamens at the centre. A jasmin ran along on one side, nasturtiums clambered up the other. Above, the grapevine trained over a trellis; its leaves, already turning ruddy, made a rich border which a sculptor could not have reproduced, the alternations of light and shade produced by the

notching of the leaves gave it such fascinating grace.

"Here you find life reduced to its simplest form," said the curé, smiling, without laying aside the melancholy manner due to the burden of sadness upon his heart. "If we had known of your arrival,—but who could have foreseen its purpose?—Ursule would have obtained some mountain trout; there is a stream in the forest in which there are some fine ones. But I forget that this is August and the Gabou is dry! My brain is rather confused."

"You are happy here?" queried the young abbé.

"Yes, monsieur. God willing, I shall die curé of Montégnac. I could wish that my example might be followed by some distinguished men who have thought that they could do better by becoming philanthropists. Modern philanthropy is the bane of society, the principles of the Catholic religion alone can cure the diseases that prey upon the social body. Instead of describing the disease and extending its ravages by plaintive elegies, everyone should put his hand to the work and enter the Lord's vineyard as a simple workman. My task here is far from being finished, monsieur; it is not enough to preach morality to people whom I found in a frightful state of impiety, and I wish to die amid a generation that is absolutely converted."

"You have done no more than your duty," said the young man, in his former dry tone, for he was bitten to the heart by jealousy.

"Oh! monsieur," rejoined the priest, modestly,

after casting a shrewd glance at him, as if to ask: "Is this another test?"—"Every hour in the day I pray that everyone in the realm may do his."

That sentence, profoundly significant as it was, received added significance from the tone in which it was spoken, which proved that that priest, who was as great by reason of his mental powers, as by the humility of his conduct, and who subordinated his ideas to those of his superiors, had a keen insight into the destiny of the monarchy and the Church.

When the two unhappy women had arrived, the abbé, being most impatient to return to Limoges, left them in the rectory, and and went to see if the horses were harnessed. A few moments later he returned to say that everything was ready for their departure. The four set out in the presence of the whole population of Montégnac, who stood grouped on the road in front of the post-house. The mother and sister of the condemned man did not speak. The two priests, foreseeing shoals and quicksands in many subjects, could neither seem indifferent nor be gay. Seeking to discover some neutral ground for conversation, they started across the plain whose aspect had its effect upon the duration of their melancholy silence.

"What motives led you to embrace the clerical profession?" Abbé Gabriel abruptly asked the curé, impelled by a thoughtless curiosity which seized upon him as they came out upon the main road.

"I did not look upon the priesthood as a profession," replied the curé, simply. "I do not understand how any man can become a priest for any

other reason than the indefinable force of vocation. I know that some men have become workers in the Lord's vineyard after wearing out their hearts in the service of the passions; some have loved without hope, others have been deceived; these have lost the bloom of their lives when burying a cherished wife or an adored mistress; those have become disgusted with society at a time when uncertainty hovers over everything, even the sentiments, when doubt mocks at the sweetest certainties, calling them beliefs. Some abandon politics at a time when government seems to be an expiation, when the governed look upon obedience as a fatality. Many leave a society without standards, where opposing parties join together to dethrone the right. I do not imagine that men give themselves to God from motives of cupidity. Some men may see in the priesthood a means of regenerating our country; but, according to my feeble judgment, the patriot priest is an absurdity. The priest should belong to God alone. I did not choose to offer to Our Father, although he accepts everything, the broken fragments of my heart and the remains of my will, I gave myself to him entire. In one of the touching theories of the heathen religions, the victim destined for sacrifice to the false gods went to the temple flower-crowned. That custom always appealed to me. A sacrifice is nothing without grace. My life is simple and devoid of the slightest touch of romance; if you desire a full confession, I will tell you all. My family is in more than easy circumstances, almost rich.

My father, the sole artisan of his fortune, is a stern, inflexible man; he treats his wife and his children as he treats himself. I never detected the slightest approach to a smile upon his lips. His iron hand, his bronze face, his gloomy and fitful energy, repressed us all, wife, children, clerks, and servants, beneath a savage despotism. I might—I speak for myself alone—have become reconciled to that life, if the power that oppressed us had been even and regular in its action; but it was moody and variable, and the alternations were intolerable. We never knew whether we were doing right or were at fault, and the horrible suspense that resulted from that uncertainty is unendurable in domestic life. Under such circumstances one prefers to be in the street rather than at home. If I had been alone in the house, I would have endured anything from my father without a murmur; but my heart was torn by the poignant grief that gave no respite to a mother whom I passionately loved, whose tears, when I surprised her weeping, threw me into fits of rage in which I lost control of my reason. The time that I passed at school, usually a period of unhappiness and hard labor to children, was like an age of gold to me. I dreaded holidays. My mother was happy when I came home. When I had finished my schooling, when I was obliged to return to the paternal roof and become a clerk for my father, I found it impossible to remain there longer than a few months: my reason, led astray by the mad impulses of youth, might give way. One gloomy autumn evening, as I

walked with my mother along Boulevard de Bourdon, then one of the dreariest spots in Paris, I discharged my heart into hers, and told her that I saw no possible life for myself, except in the Church. My inclinations, my ideas, my very loves were certain to be thwarted so long as my father lived. He would be compelled to respect me beneath the priest's cassock, so that I could in that way become the protector of my family on certain occasions. My mother wept bitterly. Just at that time, my elder brother, who afterwards became a general and was killed at Leipsic, enlisted as a simple soldier, for the same reasons which decided my calling. I pointed out to my mother, as a means of providing for her own well-being, that she must select a son-in-law of determined character and marry my sister to him as soon as she was old enough to be settled in life; and that she could make her home with that newly-established household. Thus, on the pretext of evading the conscription without cost to my father, I entered the seminary of Saint-Sulpice in 1807, at the age of nineteen, declaring my vocation to the priesthood. In those famous old buildings I found peace and happiness, disturbed only by the presumed suffering of my mother and sister; their domestic sorrows evidently increased, for whenever they saw me they encouraged my resolution. Initiated, perhaps, by my past afflictions into the secrets of charity, as defined by the great Saint Paul in his adorable Epistle, I determined to heal the wounds of the poor in some out-of-the-way corner of the earth, and

to prove by my example, if God should vouchsafe to bless my efforts, that the Catholic religion, in its work among mankind, is the only true, the only noble and worthy civilizing power. During the last days of my diaconate, the divine grace enlightened me. I freely forgave my father, in whom I saw the instrument of my destiny. Notwithstanding a long and loving letter, in which I explained everything, pointing to the marks of God's finger on every side, my mother shed many tears when she saw my hair fall beneath the scissors of the Church; she knew how many pleasures I renounced, but did not know to what glorious achievements I secretly aspired. Women are so affectionate! When I belonged to God, I experienced unbounded peace of mind, I felt neither the wants nor the vanities nor the anxieties concerning property that disturb the tranquillity of so many men. I believed that Providence would take care of me as something of its own. I entered a world whence fear is banished, where the future is certain, and where everything is the work of a divine hand, even the silence. That tranquillity is one of the benefits of grace. My mother could not conceive that a man may marry a church; nevertheless, when she saw me with a serene brow and a happy expression, she was happy. After being ordained, I came to the Limousin to see one of my father's relatives, who, by chance, mentioned the condition of the canton of Montégnac. A thought burst upon my mind like a brilliant light, and said to me: 'There is your vineyard!' And I came here.

So, monsieur, my story is quite simple and devoid of interest, as you see."

At that moment, Limoges appeared in the rays of the setting sun. At the sight, the two women could not restrain their tears.

The young man whom those two different forms of affection were about to seek, and who aroused so much ingenuous curiosity, so much hypocritical compassion and eager solicitude, lay upon a prison pallet, in the cell set apart for men condemned to death. A spy was on guard at the door to catch any words that might escape him, either in his sleep, or in his paroxysms of rage, so determined was the law to exhaust all human means to discover Jean-François Tascheron's accomplice and recover the stolen money.

The Des Vanneaulx had aroused the interest of the police, and the police kept watch over that absolute silence. When the man set to watch the prisoner's mind looked at him through a loophole made for the purpose, he found him always in the same attitude, buried in his strait-jacket, and with his head secured by a leather strap, since he had tried to tear the material and the cords with his teeth. Jean-François stared at the floor with a glaring, desperate eye, an eye that glowed like a coal and seemed inflamed by the over-abundance of life kindled by terrible thoughts. He was like a living statue of Prometheus of old, the thought of some joy forever lost gnawed at his heart; so that, when the second avocat-général went to see

him, that magistrate could not refrain from manifesting his amazement at his unvarying state. At sight of every living being who was introduced into his cell, Jean-François flew into a frenzy which went beyond all that the previous experience of the physicians had taught them to expect in such cases. As soon as he heard the key turned in the lock or the bolts drawn that secured the iron door, a white foam gathered upon his lips.

Jean-François was at this time twenty-five years old; he was small, but well-built. His coarse, curly hair, growing well down over his forehead, denoted great energy of character. His eyes, which were a clear, luminous light-brown in color, were too near the nose, a defect that made him resemble birds of prey. He had the round, brown face that distinguishes the people of the centre of France. One feature corroborated an observation of Lavater as to people predestined to commit murder; his front teeth overlapped. Nevertheless, his face betokened probity and childlike moral innocence: so that it did not seem strange that a woman should have loved him passionately. He had a pleasant mouth, embellished with teeth of ivory whiteness. The red of his lips was noticeable by reason of that tinge as of red lead which indicates restrained ferocity, and which, in many men, finds a free field in the lusts of the flesh. His bearing showed no trace of any of the bad habits to which mechanics are addicted. To the eyes of the women who followed the trial, it seemed evident that a woman had

softened those fibres accustomed to hard work, had ennobled the countenance of that man of the fields and imparted grace to his person. Women recognize the traces of love in a man, just as men can judge, in the case of a woman, whether, as the phrase goes, love has passed that way.

That evening, Jean-François heard the noise made by the bolts and the key in the lock; he quickly turned his head and uttered the terrible low growl with which his paroxysms began; but he trembled violently when the beloved faces of his mother and sister appeared in the soft twilight, and behind them the face of the curé of Montégnac.

"The savages! this is what they had in store for me!" he exclaimed, closing his eyes.

Denise, as one who had lived in prison, was suspicious of everything; doubtless the spy had hidden, meaning to return: she rushed to her brother's side, laid her face, wet with tears, against his, and whispered in his ear:

"Do you suppose they will listen to what we say?"

"Otherwise, they wouldn't have sent you," he replied, aloud. "A long while ago, I asked as a favor not to see any of my family."

"How they have abused him!" said the mother to the curé. "My poor child! my poor child!"

She fell on the foot of the pallet, burying her face in the priest's cassock, as he stood near her.

"I didn't expect to see him bound and tied like this, and put in a bag—"

THE PRISON AT LIMOGES

Denise, as one who had lived in prison, was suspicious of everything; doubtless the spy had hidden, meaning to return: she rushed to her brother's side, laid her face, wet with tears, against his, and whispered in his ear:

"Do you suppose they will listen to what we say?"

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"If Jean will promise to be quiet, to make no attempt on his life, and to behave properly while we are with him," said the curé, "I will obtain permission for him to be unbound; but the slightest departure from his promise will fall upon me."

"I feel so strongly the need of moving my arms as I please, dear Monsieur Bonnet," said the condemned man, whose eyes were wet with tears, "that I give you my word that I will do as you wish."

The curé left the cell, the jailer came in, the strait-jacket was removed.

"You won't kill me to-night, eh?" said the jailer.

Jean made no reply.

"Poor brother," said Denise, offering him a basket which had been carefully inspected, "here are some of the things you like best, for of course they feed you for love of God!"

She took out some fruit that she had picked as soon as she had learned that she could go to the prison, and a cake which her mother had taken from the table. This attention, which recalled his younger days, his sister's voice and gestures, his mother's presence and the curé's, all combined to bring about a reaction in Jean's mental condition: he burst into tears.

"Ah! Denise," he said, "I haven't had a single meal in six months. I have eaten when hunger drove me to it, that's all!"

The mother and daughter went in and out of the

cell. Animated by the spirit which leads all women to attend to the comfort of men, they ended by providing their poor boy with a hearty supper. They had assistance: orders had been given to aid them in every way consistent with the prisoner's safe-keeping. The Des Vanneaulx had had the melancholy courage to contribute to the well-being of the man from whom they still hoped to obtain their inheritance. Thus Jean had one last gleam of the joys of domestic life, joys made sad by the tinge of gloom spread over them by the circumstances.

"Is my appeal rejected?" he said to Monsieur Bonnet.

"Yes, my child. It only remains for you now to die in a manner befitting a Christian. This life is nothing in comparison with the life that awaits you; you must think of your eternal welfare. You can pay your debt by letting them have your life, but God is not content with so little."

"Let them have my life?—Ah! you do not know all that I must leave!"

Denise glanced at her brother as if to say to him that, even in religious matters, prudence is essential.

"Let us not speak of that," he said, eating fruit with an avidity that denoted an inward fire of great intensity. "When must I—?"

"No, do not speak of that again in my presence!" exclaimed the mother.

"But I should be more easy in my mind," he said in an undertone to the curé.

"Still the same disposition!" cried Monsieur Bonnet, as he leaned toward him to say in his ear: "If you are reconciled to God to-night, and if your repentance justifies me in giving you absolution, it will be to-morrow.—We have made great progress already by calming you," he added aloud.

At the last words, Jean's lips turned pale, his eyes contracted violently, and something like the first gust of a storm passed over his face.

"Why am I calm?" he asked.

Luckily, he met Denise's tearful eyes, and he recovered his self-control.

"Well, you are the only one I can listen to," he said to the curé. "Well they knew the only way in which they could conquer me!"

He threw himself upon his mother's bosom.

"Listen, my son," said his mother, through her tears; "dear Monsieur Bonnet risks his own life by undertaking to lead you—"

She hesitated, then added:

"To everlasting life."

Then she kissed Jean's head and held it against her heart for several moments.

"He will go with me?" asked Jean, looking at the curé, who took it upon himself to answer by inclining his head.—"Very well, I will listen to him, I will do whatever he wishes."

"Do you promise me?" said Denise; "for the salvation of your soul is what we all long for. Do you want it to be said in Limoges and all over the province that a Tascheron couldn't die like a man?

Think that all you lose here you will find again in heaven, where pardoned souls are reunited."

That superhuman effort parched the heroic girl's throat. She followed her mother's example, she held her peace, but she had triumphed. The criminal, frantic hitherto at the thought of having his happiness snatched from him by the law, felt an involuntary thrill at the sublime Catholic idea so artlessly expressed by his sister. All women, even a young peasant like Denise, can, at need, perform such delicate tasks; do they not all love to think of love as eternal? Denise had touched a very sensitive chord. Awakened pride aroused the other virtues, frozen by so much misery and struck dumb by despair. Jean took his sister's hand, kissed it, and pressed it to his heart in a profoundly significant manner: he held it gently and powerfully at the same time.

"Come," he said, "I must give up everything! Here are the last heart-beat and the last thought, Denise; take them!"

And he bestowed upon her one of those glances by which, in great crises, man tries to impress an image of his heart upon another heart.

Those words, that thought, were in themselves a whole testament. All those unspoken legacies, which were to be as faithfully transmitted as they had been trustfully bequeathed, were understood so well by the mother, the sister, Jean himself, and the priest, that they all turned away from one another in order not to disclose their tears, and to keep their

own counsel concerning their thoughts. Those few words were the death-agony of a passion, the farewell of a loving heart to the fairest earthly things, in anticipation of an orthodox renunciation. Thus did the curé, overpowered by the majesty of all great human things, even those that are criminal, judge that hidden passion by the magnitude of the sin: he raised his eyes as if to invoke God's forgiveness. There were made manifest the touching consolation and the infinite tenderness of the Catholic religion, so human and so gentle in the hand that descends even to man to explain to him the law of the superior worlds, so divine, and so awe-inspiring in the hand that it holds out to him to lead him to Heaven. But Denise had mysteriously pointed out to the curé the spot where the rock would give way, the cleft from which the waters of repentance would gush forth. Suddenly, disturbed anew by the memories they thus evoked, Jean uttered the blood-curdling cry of the hyena surprised by hunters.

"No, no!" he cried, falling on his knees, "I wish to live. Take my place, mother, give me your clothes, I shall be able to escape. Mercy! mercy! Go to the king, tell him—"

He stopped, uttered a horrible roar, and clung to the curé's cassock.

"Go," said Monsieur Bonnet in an undertone to the two heart-broken women.

Jean heard the words; he raised his head, looked at his mother and his sister, and kissed their feet.

"Let us say adieu, do not come again; leave me

alone with Monsieur Bonnet, have no further anxiety about me," he said to them, straining them to his heart in an embrace in which he seemed to put his whole life.

"How can people help dying of such grief?" said Denise to her mother, as they passed through the wicket.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when this separation took place. At the door of the prison the two women found Abbé de Rastignac, who asked them concerning the prisoner.

"He will certainly be reconciled to God," said Denise. "If repentance has not already come, it is very near."

A few moments later the bishop was informed that the clergy would triumph on that occasion, and that the condemned man would go to his doom in the most edifying, religious frame of mind. Monseigneur—the procureur-général was with him—expressed a wish to see the curé. Monsieur Bonnet did not appear until midnight. Abbé Gabriel, who went back and forth many times from the bishop's palace to the jail, thought it best to take the curé in the bishop's carriage, for the poor priest was in a state of prostration which deprived him of the use of his legs. The prospect of the hard day he was to have on the morrow, and the secret struggles he had witnessed, the spectacle of the full repentance to which his long-rebellious lamb had come at last, when the vast scheme of eternity was made clear to him—all combined to exhaust Monsieur Bonnet,

whose nervous, magnetic nature readily took to itself a full share in another's miseries. Hearts like that noble heart espouse so eagerly the impressions, the wretchedness, the passions, the suffering of those in whom they are interested, that they really feel them, but in a horrible way, in that they are able to measure their extent, which escapes those who are blinded by intensity of passion or by paroxysms of grief. In that respect, a priest like Monsieur Bonnet is an artist who feels, instead of being an artist who passes judgment. When the curé found himself in the bishop's salon, surrounded by the two vicars-general, Abbé de Rastignac, Monsieur de Granville, and the procureur-général, he thought that he could see that they expected some information from him.

"Monsieur le Curé," said the bishop, "have you obtained any disclosures which you can entrust to the officers of the law, without proving false to your duties?"

"Monseigneur, before giving absolution to that poor wandering child, I not only waited until his repentance was as sincere and complete as the Church could wish, but I demanded that the money should be restored."

"The matter of restitution," said the procureur-général, "is what has brought me to Monseigneur's house; it must be made in such way as to throw some light upon the unknown parties to this affair. There certainly were accomplices—"

"The interests of human justice," replied the

curé, "are not the motives of my action. I do not know where or how restitution will be made, but made it will be. By calling me to one of my parishioners, Monseigneur placed me in a position where I am acting under the conditions which give to curés within their parishes the same rights that Monseigneur exercises in his diocese, except in cases of ecclesiastical discipline and obedience."

"Very good," said the bishop. "But what is desired is to obtain from the condemned man a voluntary confession in the presence of the law."

"My mission is to bring a soul back to God," replied Monsieur Bonnet.

Monsieur de Grancour shrugged his shoulders slightly, but Abbé Dutheil nodded his head as a sign of approbation.

"Doubtless, Tascheron wishes to shield someone whose identity the restitution would disclose?" said the procureur-général.

"Monsieur," replied the curé, "I know absolutely nothing which would tend to contradict or confirm your hypothesis. In any event, the secrecy of the confessional is inviolable."

"But the restitution will take place?" inquired the man of law.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the man of God.

"That is enough for me," said the procureur-général, who relied upon the skill of the police to obtain information; as if passion and personal interest were not more clever than all the police on earth.

Two days later, on a market-day, Jean-François Tascheron was taken to his doom, as all the pious and politic souls in the town desired. A pattern of modesty and piety, he fervently kissed a crucifix which Monsieur Bonnet held in a trembling hand. The unhappy wretch was carefully scrutinized, his glances were watched by every eye: would he look at some one in the crowd, or at some house? His discretion was absolute, inviolable. He died the death of a Christian, repentant and absolved from his sins.

The poor curé of Montégnac was taken away unconscious from the foot of the scaffold, although he had not seen the fatal machine.

During the following night, three leagues from Limoges, at a point on the road where the plain was narrow and deserted, Denise, although exhausted with fatigue and grief, begged her father to allow her to return to Limoges with Louis-Marie Tascheron, one of her brothers.

"What more do you want to do in that town?" demanded the father, sharply, wrinkling his forehead and contracting his eyebrows.

"Father," she whispered in his ear, "not only must we pay the lawyer who defended him, but we must restore the money he hid."

"True," said the upright man, putting his hand in a leather bag which he carried about him.

"No, no," said Denise, "he is no longer your son. It is not for those who cursed him, but for those who blessed him, to pay the lawyer."

"We will wait for you at Havre," said the father.

Denise and her brother re-entered the town, unseen, before dawn. When, subsequently, the police learned of their return, they could never find out where they had concealed themselves. About four o'clock, Denise and her brother went up to the upper town, keeping close to the walls. The poor girl dared not raise her eyes for fear of meeting other eyes that had seen her brother's head fall. After they had sought out the curé, who, notwithstanding his feeble condition, consented to act as Denise's father and protector on this occasion, they went to the house of the advocate, who lived on Rue de la Comédie.

"Good morning, my poor children," said the advocate, saluting Monsieur Bonnet; "in what way can I serve you? You wish, perhaps, to employ me to demand your brother's body?"

"No, monsieur," said Denise, weeping at that thought, which had not occurred to her; "I have come to pay our debt to you, so far as money can pay an everlasting debt."

"Be seated," said the advocate, noticing that Denise and the curé remained standing.

Denise turned and took from her dress two five-hundred-franc notes, which were pinned to her chemise, and sat down after handing them to her brother's defender. The curé cast upon the advocate a flashing glance which soon became humid.

"Keep the money for yourself, my poor girl,"

said the advocate; "the rich do not pay so handsomely for a lost cause."

"Monsieur," said Denise, "it is impossible for me to do as you say."

"Why, does not the money come from you?" inquired the advocate, eagerly.

"Excuse me," she said, looking at Monsieur Bonnet, to know if God would not be offended at the falsehood.

The curé kept his eyes upon the floor.

"Very well," said the advocate, retaining one five-hundred-franc note and handing the other to the curé, "I will divide with the poor.—Now, Denise, exchange this, which certainly is mine," he said, offering her the other note, "for your velvet ribbon and your gold cross. I will hang the cross on my mantel, in memory of the purest and best maiden's heart that I shall ever meet in my professional life."

"I will give it to you for nothing," cried Denise, taking off the cross and handing it to him.

"Very well, monsieur," said the curé, "I accept the five hundred francs to be used in exhuming the poor child's body and carrying it to the cemetery at Montégnac. Surely God has forgiven him, and Jean will be allowed to rise with all my flock on the great day when the just and the repentant are summoned to sit at the right hand of the Father."

"Doubtless," said the advocate.

He took Denise's hand and drew her toward him to kiss her forehead; but that movement had another object.

"My child," he said to her, "no one has five-hundred-franc notes at Montégnac; they are decidedly scarce at Limoges, where no one takes them except at a discount; so that this money was given to you—you will not tell me by whom, nor do I ask you, but listen to me: if you have anything more to do in this town with reference to your brother, beware! Monsieur Bonnet and your brother and yourself will be watched by spies. They know that your family has gone. When they find out that you are here, you will be surrounded without suspecting it."

"Alas!" she said, "I have nothing more to do here!"

"She will be prudent," said the advocate to himself as he showed her out. "She is warned, let her look to herself."

In the last days of September, which were as warm as midsummer, the bishop invited the town authorities to dinner. Among the guests were the king's attorney and the avocat-général. The party was enlivened by divers discussions, which prolonged it unduly. There were whist and backgammon, the game that bishops affect. About eleven o'clock the king's attorney was standing on the upper terrace. From the spot where he stood he could see a light on that island, which on a certain evening had attracted the attention of Abbé Gabriel and the bishop,—Véronique's island, in fact; that light reminded him of the inexplicable mystery surrounding the crime committed by Tascheron. As he could conceive no

reason why a fire should be burning on the Vienne at that hour, the thought that had struck the bishop and his secretary flashed through his mind with a gleam as sudden as that of the light shining in the distance.

"We have all been great fools!" he cried; "but we have the accomplices."

He returned to the salon, sought out Monsieur de Granville, and whispered a few words to him, whereupon they both disappeared; but Abbé de Rastignac followed them as a matter of courtesy, watched them go out, saw that they went toward the terrace, and noticed the fire on the edge of the island.

"She is lost!" he thought.

The messengers of justice arrived too late. Denise and Louis-Marie, whom Jean had taught to dive, were, in fact, on the shore of the Vienne, at a spot Jean had described to them; but Louis-Marie had already dived four times, and each time he had brought back twenty thousand francs in gold. The first sum was in a silk handkerchief tied together by the four corners. That handkerchief, after being wrung out, had been thrown into a great fire of dead wood, which they had lighted beforehand. Denise did not leave the fire until she saw that the handkerchief was entirely consumed. The second wrapper was a shawl, and the third a cambric handkerchief. Just as she was tossing the fourth wrapper into the fire, the gendarmes, with whom was a commissioner of police, seized that important piece of testimony, which Denise allowed them to take without

manifesting the slightest emotion. It was a handkerchief upon which, notwithstanding the length of time it had been in the water, there were some traces of blood. Being questioned on the spot as to what she was doing there, Denise said that she had taken the stolen money from the water, following the directions given by her brother; the commissioner asked her why she burned the wrappers, she replied that she was carrying out one of the conditions imposed by her brother. When she was asked of what nature the wrappers were, she replied boldly and with perfect truth:

"A silk handkerchief, a cambric handkerchief, and a shawl."

The handkerchief that had been seized belonged to her brother.

This fishing and its attendant circumstances made a great sensation in Limoges. The shawl especially confirmed the prevailing belief that Tascheron had committed his crime through love.

"He still shelters her after his death," said a lady, upon being informed of these latest disclosures, so adroitly rendered of no avail.

"Perhaps some husband in Limoges will miss a silk handkerchief, but he will be obliged to hold his peace," said the procureur-général, with a smile.

"Mistakes in the matter of toilet are becoming so compromising, that I propose to look over my wardrobe this very night," laughed old Madame Perret.

"Whose are the pretty little feet whose imprints were so thoroughly effaced?" queried Monsieur de Granville.

"Bah! an ugly woman's, perhaps," replied the second avocat-général.

"She has paid dearly for her sin!" observed Abbé de Grancour.

"Do you know what this affair proves?" cried the avocat-général. "It shows all that women lost in the Revolution, which swept away social distinctions. Such passions are no longer met with except in men who see an immense distance between themselves and their mistresses."

"You attribute a great store of vanity to love," rejoined Abbé Dutheil.

"What does Madame Graslin think?" inquired the prefect.

"What do you suppose that she thinks? She was confined during the execution, as she prophesied to me, and she has seen no one since, for she is dangerously ill," replied Monsieur de Granville.

In another salon in Limoges an almost comical scene took place. The friends of the Des Vanneaulx came to congratulate them on the restitution of their inheritance.

"Ah! they ought to have pardoned that poor man," said Madame des Vanneaulx. "Love, not selfish greed, was what drove him to that crime: he was neither vicious nor wicked."

"He acted in a most delicate way," said Monsieur des Vanneaulx, "and, *if I knew where his family were*,

I would do something for them. They are excellent people, those Tascherons."

When, toward the close of the year 1829, Madame Graslin was able to leave her bed after the long illness that followed her confinement and compelled her to remain in absolute retirement and in bed, she heard her husband speak of a transaction of considerable magnitude, which he had in contemplation. The Navarreins family were thinking of selling the forest of Montégnac and the wild lands which they possessed in the vicinity. Graslin had not as yet executed the clause in his marriage-contract which bound him to invest his wife's dowry in real estate; he had preferred to employ the money in his banking business, and had already doubled it. Upon hearing the subject mentioned, Véronique seemed to remember the name of Montégnac, and she requested her husband to carry out that stipulation by purchasing the Navarreins estate for her. Monsieur Graslin was very desirous to see Monsieur le Curé Bonnet, in order to obtain some information concerning the forest and the outlying lands which the Duc de Navarreins proposed to sell; for the duke foresaw the terrible struggle which the Prince de Polignac was making ready to bring about between liberalism and the house of Bourbon, and he augured very ill from it; so that he was one of the most fearless opponents of the Coup d'Etat. The duke had sent his man of business to Limoges, authorizing him to make concessions in consideration of a handsome sum in cash, for he had too vivid a

recollection of the Revolution of 1789, not to turn to advantage the lessons it had taught all the aristocracy. That man of business had been fencing for a month with Graslin, the shrewdest fox in the Limousin, the only man who was pointed to by one and all as being in a position to purchase and pay cash for a considerable estate.

Upon receipt of a line from Abbé Dutheil, Monsieur Bonnet went at once to Limoges and called at the hôtel Graslin. Véronique wished to invite the curé to dine with her; but the banker did not allow him to go up to his wife's apartments until he had talked with him for an hour in his study, and had obtained information which was so satisfactory to him, that he at once concluded the purchase of the forest and domains of Montégnac for five hundred thousand francs. He acquiesced in his wife's wish, stipulating that that purchase and all others connected with it were made in pursuance of the clause in his marriage-contract relating to the investment of the dowry. Graslin made this arrangement the more willingly because that act of probity cost him nothing. At the time when the negotiations were concluded, the property consisted of the forest of Montégnac, which contained about thirty thousand acres of wild land, the ruins of the château, the gardens, and about five hundred acres in the untilled plain before Montégnac. Graslin at once made several purchases to cover the whole of the first peak of the mountains of La Corrèze, where the so-called forest of Montégnac ends. Since the

establishment of imposts, the Duc de Navarreins did not receive fifteen thousand francs yearly from that estate, formerly one of the richest dependencies in the kingdom, which had escaped the sale ordered by the Convention no less because of the barrenness of the property than because of the admitted impossibility of exploiting it.

When the curé saw the woman whose name he had often heard, a woman celebrated for her piety and her intellect, he could not restrain a gesture of surprise. Véronique had then reached the third phase of her life, that in which she was destined to magnify herself by the practice of the most exalted virtues, and during which she became an entirely different woman. To the Madonna of Raphael, shrouded for eleven years in the torn cloak of the small-pox, had succeeded the noble, beautiful, impassioned woman; and that woman, bereaved by secret suffering, was transformed into a saint. The face had a yellowish tinge like that which suffuses the austere faces of abbesses renowned for their rigid mortification of the flesh. The chastened temples shone like gold. The lips had faded; they no longer displayed the redness of the open pomegranate, but the cold hues of the Bengal rose. In the corner of the eyes, near the nose, grief had made two pearly spots over which many secret tears had rolled. Tears had effaced the marks of the small-pox and worn the skin smooth. One's curiosity was invincibly attracted to that spot, where the blue network of small blood-vessels throbbed fiercely

and seemed swollen by the full stream of blood that hurried thither, as if to supply nourishment for her tears. The circle of the eyes alone retained the brown tints, which had become black below the eyes and a dark brown on the lids, now horribly wrinkled. The cheeks were hollow, and their folds indicated deep and serious thought. The chin, the muscles of which were covered in her youth by an abundance of flesh, had grown thin, to the disadvantage of the expression: it disclosed an uncompromising rigidity in religious matters, which she exercised upon herself alone. Véronique, although but twenty-nine, was obliged to have a vast quantity of white hair removed from her head, leaving only a few scattered locks; her confinement had destroyed her hair, formerly one of her loveliest ornaments. Her thinness was terrifying. Notwithstanding her physician's orders to the contrary, she had insisted upon nursing her son. The physician won a triumph in the town when all the changes took place which he had predicted in case she should disobey his orders.

"You see what result a single confinement may have upon a woman!" he said. "Of course she adores her child. I have always noticed that mothers love their children in proportion to what they cost them."

But Véronique's withered eyes were the only feature that had retained their youth: the deep blue of the iris emitted a flame of unearthly brilliancy, in which life seemed to have taken refuge on deserting that cold and motionless mask, which lighted up,

however, with a kindly expression whenever the welfare of her neighbor was in question. So it was that the curé's surprise and dismay vanished as he explained to Madame Graslin all the good that a great land-owner might effect at Montégnac, by residing there. Véronique became beautiful again for a moment, as her face was illumined by the beams of an unhoped-for future.

"I will go there," she said. "That shall be my property. I will obtain some funds from Monsieur Graslin and join you heartily in your religious work. Montégnac shall be made fertile, we will find water to irrigate your uncultivated plain. Like Moses, you strike a rock, and tears will gush forth!"

The curé of Montégnac, when questioned concerning Madame Graslin by his friends at Limoges, spoke of her as a saint.

On the day following his purchase, Graslin sent an architect to Montégnac. The banker proposed to restore the château, the gardens, the terrace, and the park, and to make inroads upon the forest by felling trees and ploughing, and he set about the work of restoration with a vainglorious energy.

Two years later, Madame Graslin suffered a great misfortune. In August, 1830, Graslin, taken by surprise by the general crash in commercial and banking circles, was carried under despite his prudence; he could not endure the thought of failure, or of losing a fortune of three millions acquired by forty years of toil; the mental disease resulting from his anxiety aggravated the inflammatory trouble that

was always lurking in his blood, and he was obliged to take to his bed. Since her confinement, Véronique's affection for her husband had developed wonderfully and had overturned all the hopes of her admirer, Monsieur de Granville; she tried to save her husband by her watchful care, she succeeded only in prolonging his agony a few months; but that delay was very useful to Grossetête, who, anticipating his former clerk's demise, obtained from him the information necessary for a speedy realization of the credits of the firm.

Graslin died in April, 1831, and his widow's despair yielded only to Christian resignation. Véronique's first thought was to abandon her own fortune to the creditors; but Monsieur Graslin's was more than sufficient to pay them all. Two months later, upon the settlement of her husband's affairs, which were taken in charge by Grossetête, Madame Graslin was left with the Montégnac estate and six hundred and sixty thousand francs, the whole of her private fortune; thus her son's name was without stain and Graslin had impaired no one's property, not even his wife's. Francis Graslin, the son, had about a hundred thousand francs of his own.

Monsieur de Granville, to whom Véronique's moral grandeur and eminent qualities were well known, proposed marriage to her; but, to the amazement of all Limoges, Madame Graslin refused the new procureur-général, on the pretext that the Church frowned upon second marriages. Grossetête, who was a man of great good sense

and of very keen perception, advised Véronique to invest her surplus wealth and the balance of Monsieur Graslin's fortune in the public funds, and he at once effected that investment for her, in July, in that class of funds which could be purchased most advantageously, namely, the three per cents, then selling at fifty. Thus Francis had six thousand francs a year, and his mother about forty thousand. Véronique's fortune was still the greatest in the department. When everything was settled, Madame Graslin made known her project of leaving Limoges to take up her abode at Montégnac, with Monsieur Bonnet. She sent for the curé once more, in order to consult him concerning the work he had undertaken at Montégnac, in which she proposed to co-operate with him; but he generously strove to turn her from that resolution, by proving to her that her place was in society.

"I was born of the people and I propose to return to the people," she replied.

The curé, overflowing with affection for his village, made the less opposition to Madame Graslin's vocation, because she had voluntarily made it impossible for herself to remain at Limoges by conveying the hôtel Graslin to Grossetête, who took it at its full value, to reimburse himself for the sums he had advanced.

On the day of her departure, late in the month of August, 1831, Madame Graslin's friends proposed to accompany her outside the limits of the town. Some went as far as the first posting-station. Véronique

was in a calèche with her mother. Abbé Dutheil, who had been recently appointed to a bishopric, sat on the front seat of the carriage with old Grossetête. As they drove across Place d'Aîne, Véronique experienced a violent emotion: her face contracted so that the play of the muscles could be seen; she pressed her child to her breast with a convulsive movement which La Sauviat concealed by taking him away from her at once, for the old mother seemed to have anticipated her daughter's emotion. Chance willed that Madame Graslin should pass the spot where her father's house once stood: she pressed La Sauviat's hand convulsively, great tears gathered in her eyes and rolled rapidly down her cheeks. When she had left Limoges, she cast a last glance behind, and seemed to experience a joyful sensation which was observed by all her friends. When the procureur-général, that young man of twenty-five whom she had refused to take for her husband, kissed her hand with an earnest expression of regret, the newly-created bishop noticed the strange phenomenon of the black pupil of Véronique's eye encroaching upon the blue, which was reduced to a narrow circle. The eye plainly indicated a violent internal revolution.

"I shall never see him again!" she whispered to her mother, who received that communication without betraying the slightest emotion upon her old face.

Grossetête was watching La Sauviat at that moment from his seat opposite her; but, with all his

shrewdness, the former banker could not divine the hatred that Véronique had conceived for that magistrate, although he was received at her house. In that direction, churchmen possess a much more extensive perspicacity than other men; so the bishop surprised Véronique by a genuine priestly glance.

"You will regret nothing that you leave behind at Limoges?" said monseigneur to Madame Graslin.

"You are about to leave the town," she answered.—"And monsieur will go there much less frequently now," she added, smiling at Grossetête, who was just saying farewell to her.

The bishop escorted Véronique to Montégnac.

"I ought to wear mourning over this road!" she said in her mother's ear, as they walked up the hill of Saint-Léonard.

The old woman, with her coarse, wrinkled face, put her finger to her lips as she pointed to the bishop, who was examining the child with alarming attention. That gesture, but, above all, the prelate's luminous gaze, caused Madame Graslin a sort of shudder. At the sight of the vast moors which lay like a gray sheet around Montégnac, Véronique's eyes lost their fire: she became melancholy. At that moment she spied the curé coming to meet her, and took him into her carriage.

"There are your estates, madame," said Monsieur Bonnet, pointing to the uncultivated moor.

IV

MADAME GRASLIN AT MONTÉGNAC

In a few moments the village of Montégnac and its hill, where the eye was attracted by the new buildings, came in sight, gilded by the setting sun and instinct with the poesy due to the contrast produced by that pretty bit of nature, placed there like an oasis in the desert. Madame Graslin's eyes filled with tears; the curé pointed to a broad white track, like a scar, on the mountain side.

"That is what my parishioners have done to testify their gratitude to their châtelaine," he said, as he pointed to that rough road. "We can go up to the château in the carriage. That road has been built without costing you a sou; in two months we will have it lined with trees. Monseigneur can conceive the trouble and toil and devotion necessary to effect such a change."

"They have done that!" exclaimed the bishop.

"And refuse to accept anything for it, monseigneur. The very poorest have lent a hand, knowing that one was coming who would be a mother to them."

At the foot of the mountain the travellers saw all

the inhabitants assembled; they discharged a few bombs and guns; then the two prettiest girls came forward, dressed in white, and offered Madame Graslin flowers and fruit.

"To think of receiving such a welcome to this village!" she cried, grasping Monsieur Bonnet's hand as if she were falling over the brink of a precipice.

The crowd accompanied the carriage as far as the main entrance. From there, Madame Graslin could see her château, of which thus far she had seen only the massive outlines. At the sight, she felt something like a thrill of terror at the magnificence of her estate. Stone is scarce in the province, the granite that is found in the mountains is exceedingly difficult to quarry: therefore the architect to whom Graslin had entrusted the rebuilding of the château had made brick the principal element in the vast structure; and it was the more economical because the forest of Montégnac furnished both the clay and wood necessary for brickmaking. The timber and the stone for all the buildings also came from the forest. Had it not been for the savings effected in that way, Graslin would have ruined himself. The greater part of the outlay had consisted in transportation of material, in preparing it for use, and in wages. Thus the money had remained in the village and had revivified it. At the first glance, and from a distance, the château seems to be an enormous red mass striped with threads of black, representing the joints, and bordered with gray lines, for the window and door frames, the entablatures, the

corners, and the stone courses at each floor are of granite, cut in diamond shape. The courtyard, which is oval in shape and sloping, like that of the château of Versailles, is surrounded by brick walls, divided into sections by tablets framed in jutting, uncut blocks of granite. At the base of the walls are thickets, remarkable by reason of the arrangement of the shrubs, all of different shades of green. Two magnificent gates, facing each other, lead on one side to a terrace that overlooks Montégnac, on the other to the offices and a farmhouse. The great main gateway, at which the road just finished ends, is flanked by two pretty pavilions in the style of the sixteenth century. The façade on the courtyard, consisting of three pavilions, one in the centre and separated from the other two by two wings, faces the east. The façade on the gardens, arranged in exactly the same way, faces the west. The pavilions have only one window in front, and each wing has three. The pavilion in the centre, shaped like a bell-tower, and with vermiculated work at the corners, is noticeable for the refined taste of divers carvings, distributed with a sparing hand. Art is timid in the provinces, and although, in 1829, decoration had made great progress on paper, owners of real estate were afraid of the expense, which the absence of competition and of skilled workmen combined to make most formidable. The pavilion at each end, which is three windows deep, is surmounted by very high, pointed roofs, adorned with granite balustrades, and in each pyramidal section

of the roof, cut by a graceful platform with beaded edge and cast-iron railing, is a beautifully carved window. The cornices of the doors and windows on each floor are decorated with carvings copied from those of certain houses in Genoa. The pavilion with three windows facing south overlooks Montégnac; the other, with a northern exposure, overlooks the forest.

From the garden front, the eye commands that part of Montégnac which includes *Les Taschérons*, and the road leading to the chief town of the arrondissement. The courtyard front enjoys the view afforded by the vast plains, bordered by the mountains of La Corrèze in the direction of Montégnac, but in the other direction extending to the invisible line of the horizon. The wings have, above the ground-floor, a single floor with sloping roofs above, pierced by dormer-windows in the old style; but the two pavilions at each end have two floors above the ground-floor. The one in the centre is crowned by a flattened dome, like that of the so-called Pavillons d'Horloge at the Tuileries and the Louvre, and containing a single room, which forms a sort of lookout, and is embellished with a clock. For the sake of economy, all the roofs were covered with gutter-tiles, making an enormous weight, which was easily supported by the heavy timbers cut in the forest. Before he died, Graslin had laid out the road which had just been finished through gratitude; for that undertaking, which Graslin called his folly, had put five hundred thousand

francs in circulation in the commune. As a result, Montégnac had materially increased in size. Behind the offices, on the hillside toward the north, which sloped gently down to the plain, Graslin had begun to build some immense farm buildings, which indicated a purpose to turn the waste lands to some use. Six under-gardeners were quartered in the offices, and, under the direction of a concierge, who acted as head-gardener, were engaged in planting and finishing such work as Monsieur Bonnet deemed indispensable. The ground-floor of the château, which was intended entirely for reception-rooms, was sumptuously furnished. The first floor was decidedly bare, as Monsieur Graslin's death had brought the shipment of furniture to a standstill.

"Ah! monseigneur," said Madame Graslin to the bishop, after she had made the tour of the château, "I expected to live in a hovel! poor Monsieur Graslin spent money foolishly—"

"And you," added the bishop, after a pause, noticing how Madame Graslin shuddered when he spoke, "you are going to spend money in charity!"

She took her mother's arm, the old woman leading Francis by the hand, and went with them to the long terrace below which lie the church and the rectory, and from which the houses in the village can be seen on the different levels. The curé took possession of Monseigneur Dutheil to point out the different aspects of the landscape. But the two priests soon spied Véronique and her mother at the other end of the terrace, standing as motionless as statues: the

old woman had her handkerchief in her hand and was wiping her eyes, the daughter had her hands stretched out over the balustrade and seemed to be pointing to the church below.

"What is the matter, madame?" the curé asked La Sauviat.

"Nothing," replied Madame Graslin, as she turned and walked a few steps to meet the priests. "I did not know that the cemetery was to be under my very eyes—"

"You can have it removed; the law permits you."

"The law!" she said, uttering the words like a shriek.

Thereupon the bishop glanced at Véronique once more. Fatigued by the threatening expression with which that priest pierced the veil of flesh that covered her mind and discovered the secret that lay hidden in one of the graves of that cemetery, she cried:

"Well, yes!"

The bishop put his hand over his eyes, and stood for some moments overwhelmed, lost in thought.

"Help my daughter!" cried the old woman, "she is turning pale."

"The air is keen, it has given me a chill," said Madame Graslin, falling in a swoon into the arms of the two churchmen, who carried her to one of the rooms of the château.

When she recovered consciousness, she saw the bishop and the curé, both on their knees, praying for her.

"May the angel who has visited you, never leave

you!" said the bishop, as he gave her his blessing. "Adieu, my daughter."

His words caused Madame Graslin to burst into tears.

"Is she saved?" cried La Sauviat.

"In this world and in the other," replied the bishop, turning once more before leaving the room.

The room to which La Sauviat had bade them carry her daughter was on the first floor of the end pavilion which overlooked the church, the cemetery, and the southern portion of Montégnac. Madame Graslin wished to remain there and installed herself as comfortably as possible with Aline and little Francis. La Sauviat naturally remained with her daughter. Madame Graslin required several days to recover from the intense emotion which had overcome her on her arrival, and her mother compelled her to remain in bed every morning. In the evening, Véronique sat on the bench on the terrace, whence her eyes wandered from the church to the rectory and the cemetery. Despite the dogged opposition of La Sauviat, Madame Graslin seemed bent upon adopting the maniacal habit of sitting always in the same place and abandoning herself to melancholy reflections.

"Madame is dying," said Aline to La Sauviat.

Warned by those two women, the curé, who was loath to intrude, came assiduously to see Madame Graslin, as soon as it was suggested to him that her mind was diseased. That true shepherd was careful to pay his visits at the hour when Véronique was

accustomed to station herself at the corner of the terrace with her son, both in mourning. October had begun, nature was becoming gloomy and sad. Monsieur Bonnet, who had realized, ever since her arrival at Montégnac, that she was suffering from some painful internal wound, deemed it wise to await the unreserved confidence of this woman who was almost certain to become his penitent. One evening, Madame Graslin looked at the curé with eyes rendered almost inanimate by the fatal indecision often observed in those who cherish the thought of death. From that moment, Monsieur Bonnet no longer hesitated, but made it his duty to check the progress of that cruel mental malady. At first, there ensued between Véronique and the priest a conflict of empty words, beneath which they concealed their real thoughts. Notwithstanding the cold, Véronique was sitting upon a stone bench with Francis on her knee. La Sauviat was standing, leaning against the brick balustrade, and purposely shut off the view of the cemetery. Aline was waiting for her mistress to give her the child.

"I thought, madame," said the curé, who was then making his seventh call upon her, "that melancholy was your only trouble; but I see," he said in her ear, "that you are suffering from despair. That is neither a Christian nor a Catholic sentiment."

"Oh!" she rejoined, with a piercing glance at the sky, and allowing a bitter smile to play about her lips, "what sentiment does the Church leave to the damned, if not despair?"

Those words enabled the holy man to detect profound and extensive devastation in that heart.

"Ah! you make of this hill your hell, when it should be the Calvary whence you could take your flight to Heaven."

"I no longer have pride enough to place myself upon such a pedestal," she replied, in a tone which disclosed her profound contempt for herself.

Thereupon the priest, in one of those moments of inspiration which are so natural and so plentiful in such beautiful virgin minds, the man of God took the child in his arms, kissed him on the forehead, and said: "Poor little fellow!" in a fatherly tone; then handed him to the maid, who carried him away.

La Sauviat glanced at her daughter and realized how efficacious Monsieur Bonnet's impulse had been, for Véronique's eyes, so long dry, were wet with tears. The old Auvergnat made a sign to the priest and disappeared.

"Let us walk," said Monsieur Bonnet to Véronique, leading her the whole length of the terrace from the other end of which Les Tascherons could be seen. "You belong to me, I have to account to God for your diseased mind."

"Let me recover from my prostration," she said.

"Your prostration is due to unhealthy meditation," he replied, quickly.

"Yes," she replied, with the ingenuousness of sorrow that has reached the point where one throws circumspection to the winds.

"I see, you have fallen into the abyss of indifference!" he cried. "If there is a degree of physical suffering at which modesty ceases to exist, there is also a degree of moral suffering at which mental energy disappears, as I well know."

She was amazed to find such subtlety of perception and such tender compassion in Monsieur Bonnet; but, as we have already seen, the exquisite delicacy of feeling, which no passion had perverted in that man, gave him a woman's motherly affection for the sorrows of his flock. That *mens divinior*, that apostolic tenderness, places the priest above other men, makes of him a divine being. Madame Graslin had not as yet seen enough of Monsieur Bonnet to discover the beauty hidden in his heart as in a spring, from which flow grace and freshness, and true life.

"Ah! monsieur!" she cried, surrendering to him with the gesture and expression of a dying woman.

"I understand you!" he said. "What are you to do? What is to become of you?"

They walked silently along the balustrade, down toward the moor. That solemn moment seemed a propitious season to the bearer of good tidings, to that son of Jesus.

"Suppose that you were in God's presence," he said, in a low, mysterious voice, "what would you say to Him?"

Madame Graslin stopped as if struck by lightning, and shivered slightly.

"I would say to Him as Christ said: 'Father, thou

hast forsaken me!'" she replied simply, and in a tone that brought tears to the curé's eyes.

"O Magdalen! those are the words I expected to hear from you," cried he, unable to restrain his admiration. "You see, you have recourse to God's justice, you appeal to Him! Listen to me, madame. Religion is, in anticipation, divine justice. The Church has reserved to itself the trial of all causes involving the soul. Human justice is a feeble image of divine justice, it is naught but a colorless imitation applied to the needs of society."

"What do you mean?"

"You are not judge in your own cause, you are in God's hands," replied the priest; "you have not the right to convict or to acquit yourself. God, my child, is a great reviewer of causes."

"Ah!" she exclaimed.

"He *sees* the origin of things, where we see only the things themselves."

Véronique stood still, impressed by these ideas, which were new to her.

"To you," continued the courageous priest, "to you, because of your grandeur of soul, I owe different words from those I owe my humble parishioners. You, whose mind is so cultivated, can exalt yourself to the divine meaning of the Catholic religion, which is expressed by images and by words to the ignorant and the poor. Listen carefully to what I say, your welfare is at stake; for, despite the great scope of the point of view at which I propose to take my stand for a moment, it will be your cause that I

argue. The *law*, invented to protect society, is based upon equality. Society, which is simply a collection of facts, is based upon inequality. Thus there is a lack of harmony between the fact and the law. Should the progress of society be impeded or favored by the law? In other words, should the law oppose the internal social movement to maintain society, or should it be made to conform to that movement in order to guide society? Since the existence of societies, no legislator has dared take it upon himself to answer that question. All legislators have contented themselves with analyzing facts, pointing out those persons who seem to them reprehensible or criminal, and establishing systems of punishment and recompense. Such is the human law: it has neither the means of preventing crimes, nor the means of preventing their repetition by those whom it has punished. Philanthropy is a sublime error, it tortures the body to no purpose, it does not produce the balm that cures the soul. The philanthropist evolves schemes, puts forth ideas, and entrusts their execution to man, to silence, to toil, to orders, to dumb, helpless things. Religion knows nothing of these imperfections, for it has extended the confines of life beyond this world. By looking upon all of us as fallen from a higher estate, and as being in a state of degradation, it has opened an inexhaustible treasure of indulgence; we are all more or less advanced toward our complete regeneration, no one is infallible: the Church expects faults, yes, even crimes. Where society sees a criminal to

pluck from its bosom, the Church sees a soul to be saved. More than that! Inspired by God, whom it studies and contemplates, the Church acknowledges the inequality of men's powers, it takes into account the disproportion of burdens. If it finds you unequal in heart, in body, in mind, in ability, in merit, it makes you all equal by repentance. Therein, madame, equality is no longer an empty word, for we can be, we are all equal by virtue of our sentiments. From the hideous fetich worship of savage tribes to the gracious inventions of Greece, to the profound and ingenious doctrines of the Egyptians and the Hindoos, interpreted by pleasing or repulsive forms of worship, there has always been in man one fixed conviction, the conviction of his fall, of his sin, whence the universal idea of sacrifice and redemption. The death of the Redeemer, who redeemed the human race, is the image of what we ought to do for ourselves: redeem our faults! redeem our errors! redeem our crimes! Everything may be redeemed—those words are the essence of Catholicism; thence come its adorable sacraments, which assist in the triumph of grace and support the sinner. To weep, madame, to groan like Magdalen in the desert, is only the beginning; to act is the end. The monasteries wept and acted, they prayed and spread civilization; they were the active instruments of our divine religion. They built, planted, cultivated Europe, while saving the treasure-houses of our knowledge and of human justice, politics, and art. The location of those irradiating centres in

Europe will always be recognizable. The majority of modern cities are daughters of some monastery. If you believe that God is your Judge, the Church says to you by my voice that everything may be redeemed by the good works of repentance. God's great hands weigh at once the evil that is done and the value of the good accomplished. Be in yourself the monastery, you may recommence here the age of miracles. Your prayers should be good works. From your good works will flow the happiness of those above whom you are placed by your fortune, your intellect, everything, even this natural situation, an image of your social position."

At that moment, the priest and Madame Graslin turned to retrace their steps toward the plain below, so that the curé could point at the same time to the village at the foot of the hill and the château dominating the landscape. It was then half-past four. A golden sunbeam shone upon the balustrade and the gardens, illuminated the château, gleamed on the pedestals of gilded iron; it lighted up the long, flat plain, divided by the road, a melancholy gray ribbon which had not the garland formed of trees that we see on both sides of other roads. When Véronique and Monsieur Bonnet had passed the huge mass of the château, they could see, above the courtyard, the stables and the offices, the forest of Montégnac, over which that sunbeam glided like a caress. Although that last ray of the setting sun touched only the highest points, it enabled them to see perfectly, from the hill on which Montégnac lies to the first

peak of the chain of La Corrèze, the vagaries of the superb tapestry that a forest displays in autumn. The oaks were masses of Florentine bronze; the walnuts and chestnuts exhibited their verdigris tones; the early-blossoming trees were arrayed in their golden foliage, and all those colors were softened by gray patches of untilled land. The trunks of the trees that were entirely stripped of leaves were like white pillars. Those ruddy, tawny, gray tints, artistically blended by the pale reflection of the October sun, harmonized with that fertile oasis, with that vast tract of fallow-land, of a greenish hue, like stagnant water. It occurred to the priest to call attention to that lovely, mute spectacle; not a tree, not a bird, death on the plain, silence in the forest; here and there a column of smoke from the cottages in the village. The château seemed gloomy, like its mistress. By virtue of a singular law, everything about a house copies the person who holds sway therein, and whose mind hovers over it. Madame Graslin, who was impressed by the curé's words, whose heart was moved by his intense conviction, and whose womanly tenderness was appealed to by the angelic quality of his voice, suddenly stopped. The curé raised his hand and pointed to the forest; Véronique looked that way.

"Do you not see in that forest a sort of vague resemblance to social life? Every man to his destiny! Observe the inequalities in that mass of trees. Those that are perched highest lack nourishing soil and water; they die first!"

"They are the ones that *the bill-hook of the woman who gathers wood* cuts off in the flower of their youth!" she said, bitterly.

"Do not recur to those sentiments," rejoined the curé, sternly, albeit indulgently. "It is the misfortune of this forest that it has never been cut; do you see the phenomenon that those dense masses present?"

Véronique, for whom the natural peculiarities of forests had little interest, obediently rested her eyes on the forest, then turned them softly on the curé.

"Do you not notice," he said, divining her ignorance from that glance, "lines below which the trees of every sort are still green?"

"Ah! yes, I see," she cried. "Why?"

"There," replied the curé, "lies the fortune of Montégnac and your own; a vast fortune which I had pointed out to Monsieur Graslin. You see the furrows formed by three valleys, the streams from which empty into the Gabou. That stream separates the forest of Montégnac from the commune adjoining ours on that side. It is dry in September and October, but carries a great deal of water in November. The supply could easily be increased by a little work in the forest in the direction of saving it all and connecting the smallest springs, but the water now serves no useful purpose; but build a dam or two between the two hills, to keep it back and store it, as Riquet did at Saint-Ferréol, where immense reservoirs were built to feed the Languedoc canal, and you will fertilize that wild moor with

water judiciously distributed by trenches, and the supply regulated by gates; water that can be used for drinking, if necessary, and the overflow be directed into our little stream. You will have handsome poplars along your canals, and you will raise cattle in the finest fields imaginable. What is grass? sun and water. There is enough soil in these plains for the roots of the grass; the streams will furnish dew which will fertilize the soil, the poplars will feed upon it and check the progress of the mists, so that their nourishing elements will be pumped out by all the plants: such are the secrets of the luxuriant vegetation in the valleys. Some day you will see life and joy and activity where silence now reigns, where the glance is made sad by the prevailing barrenness. Will not that be a beautiful prayer? Will not such works employ your leisure better than melancholy thoughts?"

Véronique pressed the curé's hand, and said only these words, but they were sublime words:

"It shall be done, monsieur."

"You can plan this great undertaking," he continued, "but you cannot execute it. Neither you nor I have the necessary knowledge for carrying out an idea, which may occur to any man, but which raises enormous difficulties, for, although simple and hardly visible, those difficulties call for the application of the most exact scientific principles. Begin to-day, therefore, to look about for the human instruments who will enable you to collect, twelve years hence, an income of six or seven thousand louis from

the six thousand acres thus fertilized. That work will some day make Montégnac one of the richest communes in the department. The forest yields you no revenue as yet, but sooner or later speculation will come in quest of these magnificent trees, treasures amassed by time, the only treasures whose production cannot be hastened or replaced by man. Some day perhaps the State will itself provide means of transportation from this forest, for the timber would be useful for its navy; but it will wait until the population of Montégnac, increased tenfold, demands its protection, for the State is like fortune, it gives only to the rich. This estate will be, in time, one of the finest in France; it will be the pride of your grandson, who perhaps will consider the château a paltry affair in comparison with the revenues."

"That shall be my life-work," said Véronique.

"Such a work will atone for many sins," replied the curé.

Seeing that he was understood, he tried to leave one final impression upon that woman's mind: he had guessed that, in her case, the mind led to the heart; whereas, on the contrary, in most women the heart is the pathway to the mind.

"Do you know," he said, after a pause, "in what a state of error you are?"

She looked timidly at him.

"Your repentance is as yet only the feeling of a defeat suffered; the despair of Satan is a horrible thing, but such was, it may be, the repentance of

men before Christ's coming; but repentance, as we Catholics view it, is the terror of a soul that stumbles in the evil way, and to whom God reveals himself in that shock! You resemble the heathen Orestes, become Saint Paul!"

"Your words have changed me completely," she cried. "Now, oh! now, I long to live."

"The spirit has conquered," said the modest priest to himself, as he took his leave with a glad heart.

He had tossed food to the secret despair that was devouring Madame Graslin, by giving to her repentance the form of a noble and meritorious action. So Véronique wrote to Monsieur Grossetête the very next day. A few days later, she received from Limoges three saddle-horses sent by that old friend. At Véronique's request, Monsieur Bonnet recommended to her the postmaster's son, a young man who was overjoyed to put himself at Madame Graslin's service and earn fifty crowns. He was a chubby-faced boy, with black eyes and hair, short and sturdily built, named Maurice Champion; Véronique was pleased with him, and he assumed his new duties at once. He was to accompany his mistress on her excursions and take care of the saddle-horses.

The head-keeper of Montégnac was an ex-quartermaster in the Garde Royale, born at Limoges, whom Monsieur le Duc de Navarreins had sent to Montégnac from one of his estates, to study its value and transmit his views to him, so that he

might ascertain what it could be made to yield. Jérome Colorat saw nothing there but wild, unfruitful plains, forests that could not be exploited because of the difficulties of transportation, a ruined château, and the necessity of an enormous outlay to make the place habitable and restore the gardens. Dismayed above all by the clearings, strewn with granite boulders, which made dark patches in the vast forest as seen from a distance, that honest but unintelligent servitor was responsible for the sale of the property.

"Colorat," said Madame Graslin to her keeper, having summoned him to her presence, "beginning to-morrow, I shall probably ride every morning. You should be familiar with the various estates that go to make up this domain, and with those that Monsieur Graslin added to it; I propose to make a tour of inspection, and you will point them out to me."

The people at the château learned with joy of the change that had taken place in Véronique's mode of life. Aline, without waiting for orders, hunted up her mistress's old black riding-habit and put it in condition to wear. The next day, La Sauviat, with inexpressible pleasure, saw her daughter dressed for riding. Under the guidance of her keeper and Champion, who consulted their respective memories as they went along, for the paths in those uninhabited mountains were hardly marked, Madame Graslin set herself the task at first of riding only over those summits to which her woods

extended, in order to make herself familiar with the slopes and the ravines, natural roadways which cut that long crest. She wished to measure her task, to study the nature of the currents, and go down to the foundations of the enterprise suggested by the curé. She followed Colorat, who rode first, while Champion rode a few steps behind her.

So long as their path lay through the thickly wooded country, alternately ascending and descending the undulations that follow one another so rapidly in the mountainous parts of France, Véronique was absorbed by the marvels of the forest. There were trees hundreds of years old, the first specimens of which surprised her greatly, but to which she finally became accustomed; then there were tall natural hedges, or, in a clearing, a solitary pine of prodigious height; and then, a much rarer thing, one of those shrubs which are dwarfed everywhere else, but, under peculiar conditions, reach gigantic proportions, and are sometimes as old as the soil. She felt an indescribable thrill at sight of a cloud rolling over bare rocks. She noticed the white furrows made by the streams of melted snow, which, at a distance, resemble scars. Beyond a gorge, devoid of vegetation, she gazed in admiration at the centenary chestnuts, as straight as Alpine firs, growing on a rock-strewn hillside. The rapid pace at which they rode afforded bird's-eye views, now of vast tracts of moving sand, quagmires with a few trees growing here and there, granite boulders, hanging rocks, dark valleys, great fields of heather, some in bloom, others withered;

now, of gloomy solitudes, where junipers and caper-bushes grow; now, of meadows carpeted with short grass, patches of ground enriched by venerable slime; in a word, of the melancholies, the splendors, the attractive and the rugged aspects, the curious spectacles afforded by nature in the mountains of central France. And, as she gazed upon those pictures, outwardly varying but instinct with the same thought, the profound melancholy expressed by that exposition of nature, at once wild and deserted, ruined, barren, gained upon her and harmonized with her secret feelings. And when, looking down through a notch, she saw the moors at her feet, when she had to climb some arid ravine where stunted shrubs had grown among the sand and rocks, and that spectacle recurred from moment to moment, the spirit of that rugged nature impressed her, suggested ideas that were new to her and were aroused by the meaning of that varied panorama.

There is not an acre of forest that has not its significance; not a clearing, not a thicket that does not suggest analogies to the labyrinth of human thoughts. Who, among those whose minds have been cultivated or whose hearts have been wounded, can walk in a forest and not hear the forest speak to him? Insensibly there arises a voice, comforting or terrible, but more frequently comforting than terrible. If we should seek the causes of the sensation, at once grave, soothing, simple, and mysterious, that seizes us at such times, perhaps we should find them in the sublime and ingenious spectacle of all those creatures

obedient and unchangeably resigned to their destiny. Sooner or later the overwhelming consciousness of the permanence of nature fills your heart, moves you profoundly, and you end by being anxious concerning God.

Thus Véronique, in the silence of those peaks, in the perfumed woods, in the serenity of the air, acquired, as she told Monsieur Bonnet that evening, the certainty of august clemency. She caught a glimpse of the possibility of an order of things more elevated than that in which her reveries had theretofore revolved. She felt happy, in a measure. Not for a long time had she experienced such peace of mind. Was that feeling due to the similarity she detected between those regions and the exhausted, withered regions of her heart? Had she gazed upon those disturbances of nature with a sort of delight, reflecting that inert matter was chastised there, although it had not sinned? Certainly she was most profoundly moved; for Colorat and Champion called each other's attention to her several times, as if she seemed to them transfigured. At a certain point, Véronique detected something indefinably stern and rugged in the steep bed of the mountain torrents. She surprised herself longing to hear the water rushing in those ravines, brilliant with the foliage of autumn.

"Always to love!" she thought.

Ashamed of that phrase, which was thrown at her as if by a voice, she urged her horse fearlessly toward the first peak of La Corrèze, and persisted in

her purpose despite the advice of her two guides. She was alone when she reached the summit of that spur, called the *Roche-Vive*, and she remained there a few moments, looking at the landscape spread out before her. After hearing the secret voice of so many created things asking to be endowed with life, she received a blow within which decided her to display in her work the perseverance which was so much admired and of which she had given so many proofs. She tied her horse to a tree by the rein and sat down upon a boulder, letting her eyes wander over that expanse where nature played the part of cruel step-mother, and she felt in her heart the same maternal yearnings she had felt before as she gazed at her child. Prepared to receive the sublime instruction which that spectacle afforded, by the almost involuntary meditations which, to use her own beautiful expression, had winnowed her heart, she roused herself as if from a lethargy.

"I understood then," she told the curé, "that our souls must be ploughed, as well as the earth."

That vast landscape was lighted up by the pale November sun. A few grayish clouds were scudding from the west before a cold wind. It was about three o'clock, it had taken Véronique four hours to reach that point; but, like all those who are consumed by a profound secret grief, she paid no heed to external circumstances. At that moment, her life was in very truth ennobled by the sublime spectacle of nature.

"Do not stay here any longer, madame," said a

man whose voice made her start; "soon you will not be able to return, for you are more than two leagues from any house; the forest is impassable after dark; but dangers of that sort are nothing compared to the risk you run here; in a few moments it will be deathly cold on this peak; the cause of the cold is unknown, but it has killed several people."

Madame Graslin saw below her a face almost black with sunburn, pierced by two eyes which resembled tongues of fire. On each side of that face a great mass of brown hair hung down, and a fan-shaped beard beneath. The man respectfully raised one of the huge broad-brimmed hats worn by the peasants in the centre of France, and uncovered one of those wasted but noble foreheads by which paupers sometimes compel the attention of the public. Véronique was not in the least terrified; she was in one of those positions in which all those petty considerations which make women fearful lose their power.

"How do you happen to be here?" she asked.

"I live only a short distance away," replied the unknown.

"And what are you doing in this desert?"

"I live here."

"How, and on what?"

"I receive a small sum for looking after this part of the forest," he said, pointing to the opposite slope of the mountain to that which overlooked the plains of Montégnac.

Madame Graslin spied the barrel of a gun and a

game-bag. If she had been afraid, she would have been reassured then.

"You are a keeper?"

"No, madame, in order to be a keeper, one must be able to take the oath, and to take the oath, one must enjoy the rights of a citizen."

"Who are you, then?"

"I am Farrabesche," said the man, with profound humility, looking at the ground.

Madame Graslin, to whom that name meant nothing, looked at the man and observed in his excessively mild face signs of concealed ferocity; the uneven teeth gave to the mouth, with its blood-red lips, an expression of irony and reckless wickedness; the brown, protruding cheek-bones had an indefinable touch of animalism. He was of medium height, had stout shoulders, a very short, thick neck, the broad, hairy hands of men of violent temper, who are quite capable of abusing their advantages in the way of brute force. His last words, too, indicated some mystery, to which his manner, his face, and his figure imparted a terrifying significance.

"Are you in my service?" said Véronique, in a mild voice.

"Have I the honor of speaking to Madame Graslin?" asked Farrabesche.

"Yes, my friend."

Farrabesche disappeared as swiftly as a deer, after bestowing a fearful glance on his mistress. Véronique lost no time in mounting and returning to her

two servants, who were beginning to be anxious about her, for everyone in that region knew of the inexplicable unhealthfulness of the *Roche-Vive*. Colorat urged his mistress to ride down through a small valley that led to the plain. "It would be dangerous," he said, "to return by the heights, where the roads, which were indistinctly marked at best, crossed and recrossed each other, and where he might go astray, notwithstanding his acquaintance with the country."

As soon as they were on the level ground, Véronique slackened her horse's pace.

"Who is this Farrabesche whom you employ?" she asked her head-keeper.

"Did madame fall in with him?" cried Colorat.

"Yes, but he ran away."

"Poor man! perhaps he doesn't know how kind madame is."

"Why, what has he done?"

"Why, madame, Farrabesche is an assassin," said Champion, artlessly.

"Then he was pardoned?" Véronique asked, in a voice that trembled with emotion.

"No, madame," replied Colorat. "Farrabesche was tried at the assizes and sentenced to ten years penal servitude; he did half of his time, then he was pardoned and came back from the galleys in 1827. He owes his life to monsieur le curé, who induced him to give himself up. If he had been sentenced to death by default, he would have been captured sooner or later, and his prospects would

have been bad. Monsieur Bonnet went after him all alone, at the risk of being killed. Nobody knows what he said to Farrabesche. They were alone together two days; the third day he brought him back to Tulle, where he gave himself up. Monsieur Bonnet went to see a good lawyer and urged him to take Farrabesche's case. Farrabesche got off with ten years' imprisonment, and monsieur le curé went to see him in prison. That fellow, who was once the terror of the country, became as gentle as a girl, and let them take him to the galleys without a word. On his release, he came here to live, under monsieur le curé's direction. No one ever speaks more than his name aloud; he goes to mass and to service Sundays and holidays. Although he has his place among us, he always sits alone at the end of a long wall. He attends communion from time to time; but he keeps apart at the holy table, just the same."

"And that man killed another man?"

"One?" said Colorat; "he has killed several! But he's a good man, all the same!"

"Is it possible?" cried Véronique, letting her reins fall on the horse's neck, in her amazement.

"You see, madame," continued the keeper, who asked nothing better than an opportunity to tell the story, "Farrabesche may have been right, in principle. He was the last of the Farrabesches, an old family of La Corrèze! His older brother, Captain Farrabesche, died ten years before, in Italy, at Montenotte, a captain at twenty-two. Wasn't that hard luck? And a man of talent, too; who knew

how to read and write, and gave promise of being a general! The family felt it sorely, and they had reason to, upon my word! I was with the other in those days and I heard of that death! Oh! Captain Farrabesche died a noble death: he saved the army and the Little Corporal! I was serving under General Steingel, a German, an Alsatian, that is, a famous general, but he was short-sighted, and that was the cause of his death, which happened some time after Captain Farrabesche's. The youngest little fellow, the one we are talking about, was six years old when he heard them talking about his older brother's death. The second brother was in the service, too, but as a private; he died a sergeant, first regiment of the guard, a fine place, at the battle of Austerlitz, where they went through the manœuvres, you know, madame, just as peacefully as they do at the Tuileries. I was there, too! Oh! I was lucky, I was in everything without getting a wound. Well, our Farrabesche, although he's a brave fellow, took it into his head that he wouldn't go. In fact, it did seem as if the army had a grudge against that family. When the sub-prefect went after him, in 1811, he ran away into the woods; a refractory, as they used to call them. Then he joined a party of *chauffeurs*,* it may have been willingly or by force, but he burned! You understand that no one but monsieur le curé knows what he did with those blackguards, saving your presence! He had many a fight with the gendarmes,

* *Burners*—marauders who compelled their victims to disclose the hiding-place of their treasure by burning the soles of their feet before the fire.

and with the line too! In fact, he was in seven skirmishes."

"He is supposed to have killed two soldiers and three gendarmes!" said Champion.

"Does anyone know the count? he has never told," rejoined Colorat. "At last, madame, almost all the others were taken; but he, young and active as he was, and knowing the country better, always escaped. Those *chauffeurs* used to stay in the neighborhood of Brives and Tulle; they used to beat about here often, because it was so easy for Farrabesche to hide them. In 1814, they paid no more attention to him, for the conscription was abolished; but he had to pass the winter of 1815 in the woods. As he had nothing of his own to live on, he helped to stop the mail-coach in the gorge yonder; but at last, according to monsieur le curé's advice, he gave himself up. It wasn't easy to find witnesses, for no one dared to testify against him. His lawyer and the curé worked so hard that they got him off with ten years. He was lucky, after burning, for he did burn!"

"But what was this burning?"

"If you wish, madame, I'll tell you what they did, as far as I have learned from one and another, for I never did it, you understand! It isn't a pretty thing to do, but necessity knows no law. Well, seven or eight of them would break into a farmer's house, or a land-owner's, who was supposed to have money about him; they'd light a fire and eat their supper in the middle of the night; then, between the fruit and the cheese, if the master of the house refused to give

them the sum of money they demanded, they'd tie his feet to the pot-hook and not untie them till they got their money: and there you are. They were always masked. Some of their expeditions didn't turn out well. *Dame!* there are always some obstinate people, some misers. One farmer, Père Cochegrue, who was so close he'd skin a flint, let his feet burn! Faith, it killed him! Monsieur David's wife, near Brives, died of the fright those people gave her, just from seeing them tie up her husband's feet. 'Give them what you have!' she said, when she was dying. He wouldn't, so she pointed to the hiding-place. The burners were the terror of the neighborhood for five years; but get it well into your head—pardon the expression, madame—that more than one son of a good family belonged to them, and they weren't the ones that let themselves be nabbed!"

Madame Graslin listened without replying. There was a moment's silence. Young Champion, eager to entertain his mistress, undertook to tell what he knew of Farrabesche.

"We ought to tell madame everything there is to tell about him. Farrabesche hasn't his equal at running or riding. He can kill an ox with his fist! He can lift seven hundred! There's no better shot than he is. When I was little, they used to tell me about Farrabesche's adventures. One day he was taken by surprise with three of his companions; they fought, I tell you! two were wounded and the third killed. Farrabesche thought he was taken; nonsense! he leaps on a gendarme's horse, behind the man, lashes

the horse and urges him to a dead run and disappears with his arms round the gendarme's body; he hugged him so tight that, after a while, he was able to throw him on the ground, remain alone on the horse and make his escape master of him! And he had the face to go and sell him ten leagues beyond Limoges. That time he remained in hiding three months, not to be found. They had offered a reward of a hundred louis to the man who should bring him in."

"Another time," added Colorat, "speaking of the hundred louis the prefect of Tulle offered for him, he helped a cousin of his, Giriex of Vizay, to earn them. His cousin betrayed him and gave him up! Oh, yes! he gave him up! The gendarmes were very happy to take him to Tulle. But he didn't go far; they had to lock him up in the jail at Lubersac, and he escaped the first night, taking advantage of a hole made by one of his accomplices, one Gabilleau, a deserter from the seventeenth, who was transferred the night before he intended to escape, and was afterward executed at Tulle. Those adventures gave Farrabesche a famous name. The gang had its trusty friends, you understand! Besides, people liked the burners. *Dame!* those fellows weren't like the ones we have to-day; everyone of the rascals spent his money royally. Fancy, madame, one night Farrabesche was chased by gendarmes, d'ye see; well, that time he escaped by staying twenty-four hours in the horse-pond on a farm; he breathed through a straw that he poked up to the surface of the muck. What was that little inconvenience to a man who

had passed whole nights on slender tree-tops, where the sparrows can hardly cling, watching the soldiers who were looking for him pass back and forth below? Farrabesche was one of the five or six *burners* that the law never could catch; but, as he belonged in the province and was forced to join them, and as his only reason for running away was to avoid the draft, the women were on his side, and that's half the battle!"

"So Farrabesche has certainly killed several men?" said Madame Graslin again.

"He certainly has," replied Colorat; "indeed, they say he killed the passenger in the mail-coach in 1812; but the courier and postilion, the only ones who could identify him, were dead at the time of his trial."

"To rob him?" asked Madame Graslin.

"Oh! they took everything; but the twenty-five thousand francs they found belonged to the government."

Madame Graslin rode a league without speaking. The sun had set, the moon was shining upon the gray moor; it seemed as if it were the sea at high tide. For a moment, Champion and Colorat looked at Madame Graslin, whose silence made them anxious; they were shocked to see on her cheeks two glistening lines, produced by much weeping; her eyes were red and filled with tears, which fell drop by drop.

"Oh! don't waste your pity on him, madame!" said Colorat. "The fellow has had a good time, he's had pretty mistresses; and now, although the

police are keeping an eye on him, he's protected by monsieur le curé's esteem and friendship; for he has repented, his conduct at the galleys was most exemplary. Everyone knows that he's as honest as the honestest man among us; only he's proud, he doesn't want to run the risk of being slighted, and he lives quietly, doing good in his way. He's laid out a nursery of ten acres for you on the other side of the *Roche-Vive*, and he plants trees in the forest wherever he sees a chance for one to grow; then he prunes the trees and picks up the dead wood, makes it into bundles and keeps it to give to the poor. All the poor people, sure of finding wood all cut and ready for them, go and ask him for it instead of taking it themselves and trespassing in your forest, so that, if he warms—*chauffe*—people to-day, he does it in the right way! Farrabesche is fond of your forest, and takes care of it as if it was his own property."

"And he lives!—all alone?" cried Madame Graslin, hastily adding the last two words.

"I beg pardon, madame; he takes care of a little boy, who's close on fifteen," said Maurice Champion.

"Faith, yes," added Colorat, "for La Curieux had the child some time before Farrabesche gave himself up."

"Is it his son?" asked Madame Graslin.

"Why, everyone thinks so."

"Why didn't he marry this girl?"

"How could he? they would have caught him!

When La Curieux learned that he was convicted, she left the neighborhood."

"Was she pretty?"

"Oh!" said Maurice, "my mother declares that she looked ever so much like—let me see—another girl who's left the country, too, Denise Tascheron."

"Did she love him?" inquired Madame Graslin.

"Oh! just because he was a *chauffeur!*" replied Colorat; "women love anything out of the common. However, nothing ever astonished the neighborhood more than that love-affair. Catherine Curieux was as virtuous as the Blessed Virgin, she was considered a pearl of virtue in her village, Vizay, a fortified village of La Corrèze, on the line between the two departments. Her father and mother are farmers for Messieurs Brézac. Catherine Curieux was about seventeen at the time of Farrabesche's trial. The Farrabesches were an old family of the same province, who had settled on the Montégnac estate and kept the village farm. Farrabesche's father and mother are dead, but La Curieux has three married sisters, one at Aubusson, one at Limoges, one at Saint-Léonard."

"Do you think that Farrabesche knows where Catherine is?" said Madame Graslin.

"If he knew, he would break his parole; oh! he would go to her.—On his return, he sent Monsieur Bonnet to her father and mother to ask for the little boy; they were bringing him up, but Monsieur Bonnet got him."

"Does no one know what has become of her?"

"Oh! the girl thought she was ruined; she was afraid to remain in the neighborhood! she went to Paris. And what is she doing there? That's the question. To look for her there is like trying to find a marble among the stones of this plain."

As he spoke, Colorat pointed to the plain of Montégnac from the slope up which Madame Graslin was then riding, within a few steps of the entrance to the château. La Sauviat, Aline, and the servants were waiting anxiously there, not knowing what to think of such a prolonged absence.

"Well," said La Sauviat, assisting her daughter to dismount, "you must be horribly tired."

"No, mother," said Madame Graslin, in such an altered voice that La Sauviat looked at her daughter and saw that she had been weeping bitterly.

Madame Graslin went to her own room with Aline, who had her orders for everything connected with her life within the château; she shut herself in her room, refusing admission to her mother, and when the old Auvergnat insisted upon entering, Aline said to her:

"Madame is asleep."

The next morning Véronique set out on horseback, attended only by Maurice. In order to reach the *Roche-Vive* as speedily as possible, she took the path by which she had returned the night before. As they rode through the gorge separating that peak from the last hill of the forest,—for, as seen from the plain, the *Roche-Vive* seemed to stand alone,—Véronique told Maurice to point out Farrabesche's

house to her and to wait for her with the horses; she wished to go alone. Maurice guided her, therefore, to a path leading down the slope of the *Roche-Vive*, opposite the plain, and pointed to the thatch-covered roof of a dwelling half-hidden in the mountain, with nurseries immediately below it. It was then about noon. A faint line of smoke that rose from the chimney indicated the location of the house at which Véronique soon arrived; but she did not show herself at first. At sight of that modest abode, situated in the middle of a garden surrounded by a hedge of dry brambles, she remained for some moments lost in thoughts which were known only to her. Below the garden was a field of several acres, of irregular shape, with here and there the spreading tops of apple, pear, and plum trees, the whole enclosed by a quickset hedge. Above the house, toward the top of the mountain, where the soil was sandy, rose the yellowed heads of a grove of superb chestnuts. On opening the open-work gate, made of boards that were almost rotten, that admitted to the enclosure, Madame Graslin saw a cow-shed, a small barnyard, and all the picturesque living accessories of the dwellings of the poor, which certainly have a poetic charm in the country. What human being can look unmoved upon the linen spread upon the hedge, the bunch of onions hanging from the ceiling, the iron kettles drying, the wooden bench with its arbor of honeysuckle, and the leeks upon the thatched roof, which are a part of almost every hovel in France, and disclose an humble, almost vegetative manner of life!

It was impossible for Véronique to approach her keeper's house unperceived, for two fine hunting-dogs gave tongue as soon as they heard the rustling of her habit among the dry leaves; she took the ample skirt over her arm and walked toward the house. Farrabesche and his child, who were sitting on a wooden bench outside the house, rose and removed their hats, assuming a respectful attitude, but without the slightest trace of servility.

"I have been told," said Véronique, looking attentively at the child, "that you have my interests at heart: I wished to see for myself your house and the nurseries, and to question you on the spot as to the improvements it would be well to make."

"I am at madame's orders," Farrabesche replied.

Véronique was pleased with the appearance of the child, who had a charming face, slightly sunburned, dark, but very regular, a perfect oval in shape, with a brow of the purest outline, orange-hued eyes of extreme vivacity, brown hair cut short in front and long on each side of the face. He was taller than most children of that age, being nearly five feet. His trousers and shirt were of coarse brown holland; his waistcoat, of threadbare blue cloth, had horn buttons; he wore a jacket of the cloth jocosely known as Maurienne velvet, which Savoyards wear, heavy, hob-nailed shoes and no stockings. His costume was exactly the same as his father's, except that Farrabesche had on his head a broad-brimmed peasant's felt hat, and the little fellow a brown woollen cap. The child's face,

although bright and animated, maintained without effort the gravity peculiar to those who live in solitude; he had been compelled to bring himself into harmony with the silent life of the woods. Thus Farrabesche and his son had developed especially on the physical side, they possessed the remarkable physical faculties of savages: keen sight, the habit of constant attention, great self-control, sure hearing, visible activity, intelligent dexterity. In the first glance that the child bestowed upon his father, Madame Graslin divined one of those attachments without bounds, in which the instinct is tempered by the mind, and in which the most militant happiness confirms both the impulse of the instinct and the scrutiny of the mind.

"Is that the child of whom I have heard?" said Véronique, pointing to the boy.

"Yes, madame."

"Have you taken no steps to find the mother?" she asked Farrabesche, leading him a few steps apart by a gesture.

"Doubtless madame does not know that I am forbidden to leave the commune in which I reside."

"And have you never had news of her?"

"At the expiration of my time," he replied, "the commissioner handed me a thousand francs which had been sent to me in small portions, every three months, and which the rules did not permit me to have until the day of my discharge. I have thought that no one but Catherine could have

thought of me, as it wasn't Monsieur Bonnet; so I have kept the money for Benjamin."

"And Catherine's parents?"

"They have thought no more about her since she went away. Indeed, they did enough in taking care of the little one."

"Well, Farrabesche," said Véronique, turning toward the house, "I will try to ascertain if Catherine is still alive, where she is, and what sort of life she is leading."

"Oh! whatever it is, madame," cried the man, tenderly, "I shall consider it great good fortune to have her for my wife. It is for her to make objections, not for me. Our marriage would legitimize this poor boy, who does not as yet suspect his position."

The look that the father bestowed upon the son described the whole life of those two beings, abandoned, or, if you please, voluntarily isolated: they were all in all to each other, like two fellow-countrymen in the midst of a desert.

"So you love Catherine?" asked Véronique.

"If I did not love her, madame," was his reply, "in my position she is the only woman in the world to me."

Madame Graslin turned quickly and walked to the grove of chestnuts, as if attacked by a sharp pain. The keeper believed that her action was guided by caprice and dared not follow her. Véronique stood there for about a quarter of an hour, apparently gazing at the view. She had before her all that part

of the forest that covers the side of the valley where the mountain torrent rushes down, at this time without water, filled with stones and resembling an immense moat, confined between the wooded mountains of Montégnac and another parallel chain of hills, very steep, bare of vegetation except for a few intrusive trees along their summits. That other chain, with its sparse birches, juniper-bushes, and furze-broom of desolate aspect, belongs to an adjacent commune in the department of La Corrèze. A country road, which follows the inequalities of the valley, serves as a boundary line for the arrondissement of Montégnac and the two estates. That unfertile side of the mountain, with a northern exposure, is bordered, as by an enclosing wall, by a fine piece of woodland which extends over the other slope of that long ridge, whose barrenness is in striking contrast to that upon which Farrabesche's house is located. On one side, angular, twisted shapes; on the other, graceful shapes, swaying with a stately motion; on the one side, the repellent, silent immobility of inferior soil, maintained by horizontal blocks of stone, by bare, denuded cliffs; on the other, trees of varying shades of green, at that season bare of foliage for the most part, but with straight, shapely trunks of divers hues, springing from every fold of the soil, their branches waving gracefully at the pleasure of the wind. A few trees more persistent than the others, oaks, elms, beeches, and chestnuts, were still clothed in yellow, brown, or violet-colored leaves.

Toward Montégnac, where the valley widens out

tremendously, the two slopes form an immense horseshoe, and, from the spot where Véronique stood, leaning against a tree, she could see valleys arranged like the benches of an amphitheatre, where the tree-tops rise in rows above one another like rows of spectators. That lovely landscape formed the reverse side of her park, in which it was afterward included. In the direction of Farrabesche's hut, the valley narrowed more and more, and ended in a gorge about a hundred feet wide.

The beauty of that view, over which Madame Graslin's eyes wandered mechanically, soon recalled her to herself; she returned toward the house, where the father and son were still standing silently, not attempting to explain their mistress's strange absence. She examined the house, which was built with more care than the thatch roof would lead one to suppose, but had been untenanted since the Navarreins had ceased to take any interest in the estate. With the cessation of hunting, the necessity for keepers came to an end. Although the house was unoccupied for more than a hundred years, the walls were sound; but the ivy and other climbing plants had enveloped it on all sides. When he had obtained leave to take up his abode there, Farrabesche had covered the roof with thatch, had floored the interior with flagstones with his own hand, and had furnished it himself. Véronique, as she entered, saw two peasants' beds, a tall walnut wardrobe, a bread cupboard, a buffet, a table, three chairs, a few brown earthenware dishes on the buffet, and such utensils as were absolutely

necessary. Over the fireplace were two rifles and two game-bags. A number of things made by the father for the child caused Véronique the deepest emotion: a man-of-war, a shallop, a carved wooden cup, a wooden box of magnificent workmanship, a box inlaid with straw, and a beautiful crucifix and rosary. The rosary was made of plum-stones, with a face of exquisite delicacy upon each one: Jesus Christ, the Apostles, the Madonna, Saint John the Baptist, Saint Joseph, Saint Anne, and the two Magdalens.

"I do that to amuse the little fellow in the long winter evenings," he said, apologetically.

In front of the house jasmine and rose-bushes were trained against the wall and framed in blossoms the windows of the first floor, which was occupied only as a place of storage for provisions; he had hens, ducks, two pigs; he bought only bread, salt, sugar, and a few other groceries. Neither he nor his son drank wine.

"All that I have been told about you, and what I see here," said Madame Graslin to Farrabesche at last, "leads me to take an interest in you which will not fail to bear fruit."

"I recognize Monsieur Bonnet's hand in this!" cried Farrabesche, in a melting tone.

"You are wrong; monsieur le curé has told me nothing; chance, or God, perhaps, has done it all."

"Yes, madame, God! God alone can perform miracles for an unhappy wretch like me."

"If you have been unhappy," said Madame Graslin, in so low a tone that the child could not hear,

displaying therein womanly delicacy which touched Farrabesche, "your repentance, your conduct, and monsieur le curé's esteem make you worthy to be happy. I have given the necessary orders for completing the large farm buildings that Monsieur Graslin had planned to erect near the château; you shall be my farmer, you shall have an opportunity to exert your strength, your activity, and to employ your son. The procureur-général at Limoges will learn who you are, and the humiliating condition of your parole, which hampers your life, will disappear, I promise you."

At these words, Farrabesche fell upon his knees as if overwhelmed by the realization of a vainly cherished hope; he kissed the hem of Madame Graslin's riding-habit, he kissed her feet. Benjamin, seeing tears in his father's eyes, began to sob without knowing why.

"Rise, Farrabesche," said Madame Graslin, "you do not know how natural it is that I should do for you what I promise to do. Did not you plant those evergreens?" she said, pointing to clumps of fir-trees, Northern pines, and larches at the foot of the dry and barren hill opposite.

"Yes, madame."

"Then the soil is better there?"

"The water is constantly undermining those rocks and bringing a little light soil over to your land; I have made the most of it, for, all along the valley, everything below the road belongs to you. The road serves as a boundary line."

"Does much water flow down through this long valley?"

"Oh! madame," cried Farrabesche, "in a few days, when the rainy weather comes, you may be able to hear the roaring of the stream at the château! but it will be nothing compared to what happens when the snow is melting. The water rushes down from those parts of the forest that are on the opposite side of the mountain from Montégnac, those long, steep, sloping walls of the mountain on which your gardens are and the park; in fact, all the streams from these hills flow into it and form a deluge. Luckily for you, the trees hold back the earth, the water rolls off the leaves, which are like an oil-cloth carpet in autumn; if it weren't for that, the soil would be washed down into the bottom of the valley, but the pitch is very steep, and I don't know if the earth would hold under a severe strain."

"Where does the water go?" asked Madame Graslin, deeply interested.

Farrabesche pointed to the narrow gorge which seemed to close the valley below his house.

"It spreads out over a chalky plateau that separates the Limousin from La Corrèze, and remains there in green patches several months; it sinks into the pores of the soil but very slowly. So no one lives in that unhealthy plain, where nothing will grow. No cattle can eat the reeds and rushes that grow in the brackish water. That great moor, which is something like three thousand acres in extent, is used as common land by three communes;

but it's just the same as it is with the plain of Montégnac, nothing can be done with it. Even on your territory there is sand and a little soil among your rocks; but there it's pure tufa."

"Send for the horses, I want to go and see it all for myself."

Benjamin started off, after Madame Graslin had pointed out the place where Maurice was waiting.

"I am told that you are familiar with all, even the most trifling peculiarities of this region," continued Madame Graslin; "will you explain why it is that the wooded slopes of the mountain on the side of the plain of Montégnac send down no streams at all, not even the slightest thread of water, in the rainy season or during the melting of the snow?"

"Ah! madame," replied Farrabesche, "monsieur le curé, who is so interested in the prosperity of Montégnac, guessed at the explanation, although he had not the proof. Since your arrival, he has told me to raise the beds of the streams here and there in every ravine and all the valleys. I had just returned yesterday from the foot of the *Roche-Vive*, where I had been examining the formation of the land, when I had the honor of meeting you. I heard the horses' steps and was anxious to know who was riding hereabout. Monsieur Bonnet is not merely a saint, madame, he's a scientific man. 'Farrabesche,' he said to me,—I was working then on the road up to the château that the commune finished; and from there monsieur le curé pointed to the whole chain of hills from Montégnac to the

Roche-Vive, nearly two leagues long,—' Farrabesche, as that slope doesn't shed any water into the plain, nature must have made a gutter that carries it somewhere else!'—Well, madame, that is such a simple idea that it seems foolish; a child could think of it! But since Montégnac has been Montégnac, not a soul, neither owners, nor stewards, nor keepers, nor rich, nor poor, all of whom alike saw that the plain was barren for lack of water, ever asked themselves where the waters of the Gabou go. The three communes that are infested with fever on account of stagnant water never tried to find a remedy, and I myself never thought about it; it needed the man of God."

Farrabesche's eyes were moist as he said the last words.

"Whatever men of genius discover," said Madame Graslin, "is so simple that everyone thinks he could have discovered it.—But," she said to herself, "there is this noble peculiarity in genius, that it resembles everybody, and nobody resembles it."

"I understood Monsieur Bonnet at once," continued Farrabesche; "he didn't have to say much to me to explain my task. The fact is all the stranger, madame, because, on the side of your plain,—for every inch of it belongs to you,—there are fissures of considerable depth in the mountains, which are cut by ravines and by very deep gorges; but, madame, all these clefts, valleys, ravines, gorges, trenches, down which the water flows, empty into a little valley which is a few feet lower

than the level of your plain. To-day I know the explanation of that phenomenon, and this is it: all along the base of the mountains, from the *Roche-Vive* to Montégnac, there is a sort of bank varying from twenty to thirty feet in height; it is a kind of rock that Monsieur Bonnet calls schist, and there isn't a break in it anywhere. The earth, being softer than the stone, has yielded and become hollowed out, so that the streams have naturally turned aside into the Gabou, through the clefts in each of the small valleys. The trees, the shrubs, the underbrush hide that disposition of the ground from sight; but, after following their direction and the marks they leave behind them, it is easy enough to convince yourself of the fact. So the Gabou receives the water from both slopes, that of the mountains, at the top of which your park lies, and that of the cliffs opposite us. According to monsieur le curé's idea, that state of things will cease when the natural conduits of the slope that overlooks your plain are dammed up by the stone and earth that the water carries down with it, and are made higher than the bed of the Gabou. Then your plain will be flooded like the common lands you wish to go and see; but it will take hundreds of years. And is it desirable after all, madame? If your soil should refuse to absorb that mass of water, as these common lands refuse, Montégnac also would have its stagnant pools which would poison the whole neighborhood."

"If I understand you, the places monsieur le curé pointed out to me a few days ago, lines of

trees on which the leaves are still green, are the natural conduits through which the streams flow down into the Gabou?"

"Yes, madame. Between the *Roche-Vive* and Montégnac, there are three mountains, consequently three valleys through which the streams, turned back by the wall of schist, flow into the Gabou. The belt of green woods at the base, which seems to be a part of your plain, indicates the location of the gutter which monsieur le curé divined."

"In that case, the thing that is now Montégnac's bane will become its blessing," said Madame Graslin in a tone of profound conviction. "And as you have been the first instrument of this work, you shall take part in it, you shall seek out active, devoted workmen, for the lack of money must be made good by devotion and hard work."

Benjamin and Maurice arrived as Véronique finished that sentence; she grasped her horse's rein and motioned to Farrabesche to mount Maurice's horse.

"Take me," she said, "to the point where the waters spread out over the common lands."

"It is the more advisable for madame to go there," said Farrabesche, "because, by monsieur le curé's advice, the late Monsieur Graslin bought about three hundred acres at the outlet of that gorge, and there the water leaves a deposit which has ended by producing rich soil over a considerable space. Madame will see the other side of the *Roche-Vive*, where there are some fine woods, and where

Monsieur Graslin would undoubtedly have built a farm-house. The most suitable spot would be where you lose sight of the stream that runs near my house—a stream that you could use to advantage."

Farrabesche rode first to show the way, and led Véronique down a steep path to the spot where the two hills came close together, then diverged, one to the east, the other to the west, as if driven asunder by a shock. The narrow gully between, piled high with stones, among which tall weeds grew, was about sixty feet wide. The *Roche-Vive* showed a perpendicular wall of granite, upon which there were absolutely no loose stones, but the summit of that impregnable wall was crowned with trees, the roots of which hung over the edge. Pines clung to the soil with their forked feet and seemed to hold themselves there like birds clinging to a branch. The opposite hill, hollowed out by time, had a lofty, yellow, sandy brow; there were caverns of little depth and uncertain hollows; the soft, crumbling rock was of the color of yellow ochre. A few plants with prickly leaves, and at the base some burdocks, rushes, and aquatic plants indicated the northern exposure and the thinness of the soil. The bed of the mountain stream was of hard, yellow stone. Evidently the two chains, although they were parallel and seemed to have been split apart at the time of the catastrophe that changed the face of the globe, were, by an inexplicable freak of nature, or for some unknown reason, to be discovered by no one but a genius, composed of entirely dissimilar elements.

The contrast between the two was particularly striking at that point. From there, Véronique saw an immense dry plateau, bare of vegetation, and with a chalky soil, which explained the absorption of the water, dotted with patches of brackish water and with spots where the soil had scaled from the rock. At her right, were the mountains of La Corrèze. At the left, the view was bounded by the great hump of the *Roche-Vive*, covered with the most beautiful trees, and at its foot a level field of about two hundred acres, where the vegetation was in striking contrast to the dismal aspect of that desolate plateau.

"My son and I," said Farrabesche, "dug the ditch you see down yonder, marked by the tall grass; it joins the one that marks the boundary of your forest. On this side, your estate is bounded by a desert, for the nearest village is a league away."

Véronique rode swiftly to that desolate plain, followed by her keeper. She leaped the ditch, galloped about the forbidding tract, and seemed to take a sort of savage delight in contemplating that vast image of desolation. Farrabesche was right. No force, no power could produce anything from that land; it rang under the horses' hoofs as if it were hollow. Although that effect was produced by the chalk, which is by nature very porous, there were fissures, too, in which the water vanished from sight, on its way, doubtless, to feed distant springs.

"There are some hearts like that!" cried Véronique, drawing rein after galloping for a quarter of an hour.

She sat on her horse, lost in thought, in the midst of that desert, where there were neither animals nor insects, and which no birds flew across. In the plain of Montégnac, there were at least loose stones and sand, some little light or clayey soil, a crust of a few inches in which roots could take hold; but the tufa, a most unnutritious substance, which had ceased to be earth and had not yet become stone, roughly intercepted the glance; so that there one had absolutely no choice but to turn his eyes upon the boundless expanse of sky. Having inspected the limit of her forests and the field purchased by Monsieur Graslin, Véronique rode slowly back toward the point where the Gabou entered the plain. She surprised Farrabesche looking at a sort of ditch which might have led one to suppose that some speculator had tried to probe that desolate corner of the earth, imagining that nature concealed treasure there.

"What is the matter?" asked Véronique, as she detected a profoundly sad expression upon that manly face.

"Madame, I owe my life to that ditch, or, to speak more truly, I owe to it the time to repent and to atone for my sins in men's eyes."

That method of defining life resulted in nailing Madame Graslin beside the ditch, where she stopped her horse.

"I hid there, madame. The ground is so resonant, that, by putting my ear to it, I could hear, more than a league away, the gendarmes' horses or the step of soldiers, which has a peculiar quality. I used to escape by the Gabou to a place where I had a horse, and I always kept five or six leagues between me and those who were hunting me. Catherine would bring me food there during the night; if she didn't meet me, I always found bread and wine there in a hole covered with a stone."

That reminiscence of his wandering, criminal life, which might have had a bad effect upon Farrabesche, aroused the most indulgent compassion in Madame Graslin; but she rode quickly toward the Gabou, whither the keeper followed her. While she was measuring with her eye the opening, through which the long valley could be seen, so bright and joyous on the one side, so desolate on the other, and in the background, more than a league away, the terraced hills beyond Montégnac, Farrabesche said:

"In a few days, there will be some fine waterfalls there!"

"And next year, at the same time, not a drop of water shall pass this way. I own the land on both sides, I will build a wall high enough and strong enough to hold back the water. Instead of a valley which produces no income, I will have a lake, twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty feet deep, a square league in area, an immense reservoir which will furnish water for the irrigating canals with which I will fertilize the whole plain of Montégnac."

"Monsieur le curé was right, madame, when he said to us while we were finishing our road: 'You are working for your mother.' May God bestow his blessing on such an undertaking!"

"Say nothing about it, Farrabesche," said Madame Graslin; "it is Monsieur Bonnet's idea."

Returning to Farrabesche's house, Véronique took Maurice and rode back at once to the château. When her mother and Aline saw her, they were impressed by the change in her countenance, for the hope of conferring a lasting benefit upon that neighborhood had restored the appearance of happiness. Madame Graslin wrote to Grossetête to ask Monsieur de Granville to remove all restrictions from the liberty of the poor pardoned convict, furnishing information as to his conduct which was confirmed by a certificate from the mayor of Montégnac and a letter from Monsieur Bonnet. She added to the letter some facts concerning Catherine Curieux, urging Grossetête to arouse the procureur-général's interest in the good action she contemplated, and induce him to write to the prefecture of police at Paris in order to find the girl. The mere circumstance of the remittance of funds to the galleys where Farrabesche had undergone his punishment should furnish a sufficient clue. Véronique was very desirous to know why Catherine had failed to join her son and Farrabesche. Then she told her old friend of her discoveries by the Gabou, and insisted that he should select for her the skilful man for whom she had already asked him.

The next day was Sunday, the first day since her installation at Montégnac that Véronique had been in a condition to hear mass at the church; she went there and took possession of the bench that she owned in the chapel of the Virgin. When she saw how bare that poor church was, she promised herself that she would set aside a certain sum each year for the necessary repairs and for decorating the altars. She listened to the sweet, fervid, angelic voice of the curé, whose sermon, although his words were simple and within the intellectual scope of his hearers, was truly sublime. The sublime comes from the heart, the mind does not find it, and religion is an inexhaustible source of that sublimity which is free from false glitter; for Catholicism, which penetrates and changes hearts, is all heart. Monsieur Bonnet found in the epistle for the day a text to enlarge upon, to the effect that God, sooner or later, fulfils His promises, blesses His people, and encourages the good. He dwelt upon the great benefits that would accrue to the parish from the presence of a rich and charitable woman, explaining that the duties of the poor to a benevolent, wealthy person were as extensive as those of the rich to the poor, that they should mutually assist each other.

Farrabesche had spoken to some of those persons who were friendly to him, as a result of the Christian charity which Monsieur Bonnet had inculcated in the parish, of the generous treatment of which he was the object. Madame Graslin's behavior toward him was the subject of conversation of the whole

commune, assembled on the church square before mass, as the custom is in the country. Nothing could have been better adapted to win for her the friendship of those eminently sensitive minds. And so, when Véronique came from the church, she found almost the whole parish drawn up in two lines. As she passed, everyone saluted her respectfully, amid a profound silence. She was touched by that welcome, but she had no idea of the real cause; she saw Farrabesche among the last, and said to him:

"You are an expert hunter, do not forget to bring us some game."

A few days later, Véronique walked with the curé in that part of the forest that was nearest the château, and suggested descending by the terraced valleys she had seen from Farrabesche's house. She then became absolutely certain of the location of the higher affluents of the Gabou. As a result of that examination, the curé noticed that the streams that watered some parts of upper Montégnac came from the mountains of La Corrèze. That chain was connected with the mountain at that point by the sterile ridge parallel to the chain of the *Roche-Vive*. The curé manifested a childish joy on returning from that walk; with the ingenuous pleasure of a poet he looked forward to the prosperity of his dear village. Is not the poet the man who realizes his hopes beforehand? Monsieur Bonnet felt as if he were already mowing his hay, as he pointed from the terrace to the barren plain.

The next day, Farrabesche and his son returned laden with game. The keeper brought for Francis Graslin a cup carved from a cocoanut, a veritable masterpiece, representing a battle. At that moment, Madame Graslin was walking on the terrace, on the side overlooking Les Tascherons. She sat down upon a bench, took the cup, and gazed a long while at that marvellous piece of work. Tears came to her eyes.

"You must have suffered much," she said to Farrabesche, after a long moment's silence.

"What is a man to do, madame," he replied, "when he finds himself in that place without the idea of flight, which sustains the courage of almost all convicts?"

"It is a horrible life!" she said, in a compassionate tone, inviting Farrabesche to speak, with gesture and glance alike.

Farrabesche mistook for intense and sympathetic curiosity the convulsive trembling and all the evidences of emotion which he noticed in Madame Graslin. At that moment, La Sauviat appeared in one of the paths and seemed inclined to join them; but Véronique drew her handkerchief, shook her head, and said, with an animation she had never before shown with the old Auvergnat:

"Leave me, mother!"

"Madame," said Farrabesche, pointing to his leg, "for five years I wore a chain fastened to my leg by a great iron ring, and binding me to another man. During my time, I was compelled to live with three

different convicts. I slept on a wooden camp-bed. I had to do an extraordinary amount of work to procure a small mattress, called a *serpentin*. Each room contains eight hundred men. Each of the beds, called *tolards*, holds twenty-four men, chained two by two. Every night and every morning the chain of each couple is attached to a large chain, called the *filet de ramas*. That chain runs along the foot of the bed and holds all the couples by the feet. Even after two years, I wasn't accustomed to the clanking of that iron, which says to you every moment: 'You are at the galleys!' If you go to sleep for a moment, some evil-minded comrade moves or quarrels, and reminds you where you are. One has to serve an apprenticeship simply to learn to sleep. In fact, I could not sleep until excessive fatigue exhausted my strength. When I was able to sleep, I had the nights, at least, to forget my surroundings. In that place, madame, forgetfulness is something! Once there, a man must learn to satisfy his needs, even in the merest trifles, in the manner fixed by pitiless regulations. Imagine, madame, what effect that life produced upon a young man like me, who had lived in the woods, after the manner of kids and birds! If I had not eaten my bread for six months between the four walls of a jail, ah! madame, notwithstanding Monsieur Bonnet's touching words,—and I may say that he was the father of my soul,—I should have thrown myself into the sea when I saw my companions! In the open air, I was all right; but, once in that room, whether to sleep or to eat,—for we

ate there at troughs, each trough prepared for three couples,—I ceased to live; the fiendish faces and the language of my companions were always unendurable to me. Luckily, at five o'clock in the morning in summer, and at half-past seven in winter, hot or cold, wind or rain, we went out to the *fatigue*, that is to say, to work. The greater part of that life is passed in the open air, and the air seems very good when you leave a room in which eight hundred convicts swarm. That air, remember, is sea air! You enjoy the sea breezes, you are on good terms with the sun, you take deep interest in the clouds that pass overhead, you hope that the day will be fine. For my part, I was interested in my work."

Farrabesche paused; two great tears were rolling down Véronique's cheek.

"Ah! madame, I have told you only of the roses of that existence!" he cried, taking Madame Graslin's expression to his own charge. "The terrible precautions adopted by the government, the constant inquisition practised by the guards, the inspection of the irons night and morning, the coarse food, the hideous clothes that humiliate you every instant, the discomfort during sleep, the horrible noise of four hundred pairs of chains in an echoing room, the prospect of being fired at and riddled with bullets, if it should please five or six villains to rebel, those terrible details are nothing; they are the roses, as I told you. A man, a bourgeois, who should have the misfortune to go there, would die of chagrin in a very short time. For you must live bound to another

man! You are forced to put up with the company of five men at meals, and of twenty-three during sleep, to listen to their conversation! That society, madame, has its secret laws; neglect to obey them, you are murdered; but obey them and you become a murderer! You must be either victim or executioner! After all, if they would kill you at a single blow, they would cure you of that life; but they are accomplished in doing evil, and it is impossible to hold out against the hatred of those men; they have absolute power over a convict who offends them, and they can make of his life a constant, never-ending torment, worse than death. The man who repents and wants to behave is the common enemy; first of all, he is suspected of informing. Informing is punished with death on bare suspicion. Each room has its tribunal, before which they try crimes against the society. To refuse to comply with the customs of the place is a crime, and a man in that position is subject to trial: for example, everyone must assist in all escapes; each convict has his hour to escape, at which hour the whole convict force owes him assistance and protection. To betray what a convict attempts in the interest of his escape is a crime. I will not say anything of the horrible morals of the galleys; it is literally true that a man doesn't belong to himself there. The government, in order to neutralize attempts at rebellion or escape, always couples two men who do not agree, and thus makes the torture of the chain unendurable; it puts men together who cannot endure each other, or who are suspicious of each other."

"How did you endure it?" asked Madame Graslin.

"Ah! there you are," replied Farrabesche, "I was fortunate: I wasn't drawn by lot to kill a man who had been convicted, I never voted for any man's death, I was never punished, I was never found fault with, and I got along very well with the three companions I had in succession; they all three were afraid of me and liked me. But you see, madame, I was famous at the galleys before I got there. A *chauffeur!* for I was supposed to be one of those devils.—I have seen the burning done," continued Farrabesche, after a pause, and in a low tone, "but I would never take a hand in it or accept any of the stolen money. I was a refractory conscript, that was all. I helped my comrades, I kept watch, I fought, I did sentry duty in advance of the main body or in the rear; but I never shed a man's blood except in self-defence! Ah! I told Monsieur Bonnet and my lawyer everything: and the judges knew well that I was no assassin! But I am a great criminal, all the same; nothing of what I did is lawful. Two of my comrades had already spoken of me as a man capable of the greatest things. At the galleys, you see, madame, there is nothing equal to a reputation of that sort, not even money. To be left at peace in that republic of misery, an assassination is a passport. I did nothing to destroy that opinion. I was sad and resigned; it was quite possible to be deceived by my face, and they were deceived. My moody attitude, my silence,

were taken for tokens of ferocity. Everybody, convicts, employés, young and old, respected me. I presided over my room. No one ever disturbed my sleep, and I was never suspected of informing. I complied honestly with their rules; I never refused to do one of them a service, I never showed the least disgust; in fact, I howled with the wolves outwardly, and prayed God within. My last chain companion was a soldier, twenty-two years old, who had stolen and deserted after his theft; I had him four years, we were friends, and wherever I may be, I am sure of him when he comes out. The poor devil, Guépin is his name, was not a criminal, he was only a light-headed fool; his ten years will cure him. Oh! if my fellows had discovered that I submitted to my punishment from religion; that, when my time was out, I intended to live in a corner without letting anyone know where I was, with the purpose of forgetting that horrible society and of never putting myself in the way of anyone of them, they might have driven me mad."

"But, in that case, for a poor, tender-hearted young man, impelled by passion, who, if the death sentence were remitted—"

"Oh! madame, there is no complete remission for assassins! They begin by commuting the sentence to twenty years at hard labor. But that is enough to make any man shudder, especially a decent young man! nobody can tell you of the life that awaits you; it is a hundred times better to die! Yes, in such a case, to die on the scaffold is good fortune."

"I did not dare to think so," said Madame Graslin.

Véronique had turned as pale as a taper. To hide her face she rested her forehead on the balustrade and remained in that position for a few moments. Farrabesche did not know whether he ought to go or stay. Madame Graslin rose, looked at Farrabesche with an almost majestic expression and, to his unbounded amazement, said to him, in a voice that stirred his heart:

"Thanks, my friend!—But whence did you derive the courage to live and to suffer?" she asked, after a pause.

"Ah! madame, Monsieur Bonnet had placed a treasure in my heart! So that I love him better than anybody on earth."

"Better than Catherine?" queried Madame Graslin, smiling with a sort of bitterness.

"Ah! madame, almost as much."

"How did he set about it?"

"That man's voice and his words subdued me, madame. Catherine brought him to the spot I pointed out to you the other day in the common lands, and he came to me alone. He was the new curé of Montégnac, he told me; I was his parishioner; he loved me, he knew that I was simply astray, not lost as yet; he did not intend to betray me but to save me; in short, he said things to me of the sort that go to the bottom of your heart! And you see, madame, that man orders you to do good with the power of those who want to make you do wrong.

He told me, the poor, dear man, that Catherine was a mother. I was going to abandon two creatures to shame and misery! 'Oh! well,' I said to him, 'they will be like me, I have no future.' He answered that I had two evil futures before me, in this world and in the other, if I persisted in not changing my mode of life. Here on earth I should die on the scaffold. If I was taken, it would be impossible to defend me before the court. On the other hand, if I should take advantage of the new government's indulgence for offences growing out of the conscription, if I should give myself up, he would leave nothing undone to save my life: he would find a good lawyer for me who would get me off with ten years' penal servitude. Then Monsieur Bonnet spoke to me about the other life. Catherine wept like a Magdalen. See, madame," said Farrabesche, pointing to his right hand, "she had her face on that hand and I found it all wet with tears. She begged me to live! Monsieur le curé promised to arrange matters so that I and my child could lead a peaceful, happy life here, giving me his word that I should be free from any sort of affront. Finally, he catechised me like a little boy. After three visits at night, he made me as supple as a glove. Would you like to know why, madame?"

Farrabesche and Madame Graslin looked at each other, neither rightly interpreting the other's curiosity.

"Well," continued the poor ex-convict, "when he went away the first time, and Catherine went to

show him the way, I was left alone. I felt in my heart a sort of refreshing calmness, a pleasant sensation that I had not felt since my childhood. It resembled the happiness poor Catherine had afforded me. The love of that dear man who had sought me out, his solicitude for me, for my future, for my soul, all moved me deeply and made me a different man. A light shone into my mind. So long as he spoke to me, I resisted him. What could you expect? he was a priest, and we outlaws didn't eat their bread. But when the sound of his steps and Catherine's died away, oh! then I was, as he told me two days later, enlightened by grace; from that moment God gave me strength to endure everything: imprisonment, trial, chains, the journey and life at the galleys. I relied on his word as if it had been the Gospel, I looked upon my suffering as a debt to be paid. When I suffered too keenly, I looked ahead ten years, to that house in the woods, my little Benjamin and Catherine. Good Monsieur Bonnet kept his word. But I missed someone. Catherine was not at the door of the prison nor on the common lands. She must have died of grief. That is why I am always sad. Now, thanks to you, I shall have useful employment, and I will work at it, body and soul, with my boy, whom I live for."

"You enable me to understand how monsieur le curé has succeeded in changing this commune."

"Oh! no one can resist him," said Farrabesche.

"True, I know it," said Véronique, shortly, dismissing him with a farewell gesture.

Farrabesche retired. Véronique spent a great part of the day walking up and down that terrace, notwithstanding a fine rain that fell until evening. She was in a sombre mood. When her face contracted so, neither her mother nor Aline dared interrupt her. She did not notice her mother, just at dusk, talking with Monsieur Bonnet, who conceived the idea of breaking in upon that fit of unhealthy melancholy by sending her son to call her. Little Francis went and took his mother by the hand, and she allowed him to lead her away. When she saw Monsieur Bonnet, she made a gesture of surprise in which there was a little terror. The curé led her back to the terrace and said to her:

"Well, madame, what were you talking about with Farrabesche?"

To avoid a falsehood, Véronique did not choose to reply; she questioned Monsieur Bonnet instead.

"Was that man your first victory?"

"Yes," he replied. "His conquest should give me all Montégnac, I thought, and I was not mistaken."

Véronique pressed his hand, and said to him, in a voice that was full of tears:

"From this day I am your penitent, monsieur le curé. I will come to-morrow and make a general confession."

That last sentence was the outcome of a great internal effort, it signified that she had won a painful victory over herself. The curé, without replying, escorted her to the château, and stayed with

her until dinner-time, talking about the extensive improvements projected in Montégnac.

"Agriculture is a question of time," he said, "and the little I know about it has taught me what profit there is in a winter advantageously spent. The rains are just beginning, very soon our mountains will be covered with snow and your operations will become impossible; so hurry Monsieur Grossetête."

Monsieur Bonnet, who bore the burden of the conversation and gradually drew Madame Graslin into it, to divert her mind, left her almost recovered from the emotions of that day. Nevertheless, La Sauviat found her daughter so excited that she passed the night with her.

The next day, a messenger from Limoges, despatched by Grossetête to Madame Graslin, handed her the following letters:

TO MADAME GRASLIN

"My Dear Child,

"Although it was difficult to find horses for you, I hope that you are pleased with the three I sent you. If you want plough-horses or draught-horses, you must get them somewhere else. In any event, it is much better to do your ploughing and hauling with oxen. Every district where farm-work is done with horses loses capital when a horse is used up; whereas oxen, instead of causing a loss, afford a profit to the farmers who use them.

"I approve your undertaking in every respect, my child; you will employ in it that consuming mental activity of yours which was turning against you and wearing you out. But this thing that you asked me to find for you in addition to the horses, this man who is capable of seconding and, above all, of understanding you, is one of those rarities that we do not raise in the provinces or do not keep here. The education of high-grade cattle of that sort is a speculation that takes too much time and is too risky for us to indulge in. Moreover, people of such superior mental endowment frighten us, and we call them *originals*. In fact, the persons who belong to the scientific category from which you wish to take your collaborator are ordinarily so prudent and lead such regular lives that I was reluctant to write you how hopeless the quest seemed to me to be. You asked me for a poet, or, if you prefer, a fool; but our fools all go to Paris. I have mentioned your plan to several young clerks in the land-registry office, to contractors for earth-work, and to men who have built canals, and no one has discovered any *profit* in what you propose. Suddenly, chance threw me into the arms of the very man you want, a young man upon whom I believed that I was conferring a favor; but you will see from his letter that benevolence should not be practised at random. A good action is the one thing in this world that should be most carefully considered. One never knows if what has seemed a good thing to do will not prove later to have been a mistake. To practise

benevolence is, as I know to-day, to create a destiny for one's self."

After reading that sentence, Madame Graslin dropped the letters, and sat for some moments lost in thought.

"O my God!" she said, "when wilt Thou cease to smite me by every hand?"

Then she took up the sheets once more and read on:

"Gérard seems to me to have a cool head and a warm heart, and that's the sort of man you need. Paris is at this moment all upset with new doctrines, and I should be overjoyed to prevent this boy's falling into the traps laid by ambitious men to deceive the instincts of our noble-hearted French youth. Although I do not approve of the decidedly benumbing life of the provinces, no more do I approve the life of excitement in Paris, this ardor for renovating everything which urges young men into new paths. You alone know my opinions: in my view, the moral world revolves on its own axis like the material world. My poor protégé asks for impossible things. No power could hold its own before such intense, imperious, arbitrary ambition. I am a believer in conservatism, in moderation in politics, and I am not fond of the social upheavals to which all these great minds subject us. I confide to you the principles I hold, as an old, dyed-in-the-wool monarchist, because you are discreet! Here I hold

my peace among a lot of excellent men who, the deeper they plunge, the more they believe in progress; but I suffer when I see the irreparable misery already inflicted on our dear country.

"So I answered this young man's letter by telling him that a task worthy of him was all ready for him. He will come to see you, and although his letter, which I enclose, enables you to form a judgment concerning him, you will want to study him further, will you not? You women divine many things from the appearance of people. Moreover, every man whom you take into your service, even the most indifferent, ought to be agreeable to you. If he does not suit you, you can refuse to employ him; but if he should suit you, my dear child, cure him of his ill-disguised ambition, make him take up with the happy, peaceful life of the fields, where charity is never-ending, where the qualities of great and strong minds can find constant exercise, where one discovers every day in the products of nature reasons for admiration, and in genuine progress, in real improvements, an occupation worthy of man. I am well aware that great ideas engender great deeds; but as that class of ideas is very rare, I think that, as a general rule, acts are of more value than ideas. The man who fertilizes a little plot of land, who brings a fruit-tree to perfection, who plants grass in ungrateful soil, is much above those who seek theories for mankind. In what respect did Newton's science change the lot of the inhabitant of the fields? O my dear, I used to love you, but to-day, understanding as I do what you are

about to undertake, I adore you. No one in Limoges forgets you, everyone admires your noble resolution to improve the condition of Montégnac. Be a little grateful to us for having the spirit to admire what is beautiful, without forgetting that the foremost of your admirers is also your first friend,

"F. GROSSETÊTE."

GERARD TO GROSSETÊTE

"I am about to impose melancholy confidences upon you, monsieur; but you were like a father to me when you might have been no more than a patron. To you alone, therefore, to you who have made me all that I am, can I say what I have to say. I am suffering from a painful disease,—a mental disease, by the way: I have sentiments in my heart and thoughts in my mind which make me utterly unfit for what the State or society demands of me. This will, perhaps, seem to you like ingratitude, whereas it is simply self-accusation. When I was twelve years old, you, my generous godfather, discovered in the son of a simple mechanic a certain aptitude for the exact sciences and a precocious ambition to succeed in life; therefore you assisted me in my flight toward a higher sphere, when my original destiny was to be a carpenter like my poor father, who did not live long enough to enjoy my elevation. Assuredly, monsieur, you did well, and not a day passes that I do not bless you; so that, perhaps, I am wrong. But whether I am wrong or

right, I am suffering; and do I not place you on an eminence by addressing my complaints to you? is it not equivalent to taking you, like God, for a supreme judge? In any event, I trust to your indulgence.

"Between sixteen and eighteen I devoted myself to the study of the exact sciences in such a way as to make myself ill, as you know. My future depended upon my admission to the Polytechnic School. In those days, my work cultivated my brain beyond all measure: I nearly killed myself, I studied night and day, I presumed further upon my strength, perhaps, than the nature of my organs permitted. I was determined to pass such satisfactory examinations that my position in the school would be assured, and sufficiently advanced to entitle me to remission of the fees, which I wished to spare you the necessity of paying. I triumphed! I shudder to-day when I think of the terrible conscription of brains turned over to the State every year through family ambition, which, by imposing such cruel study upon the young man when he is just completing his growth in every direction, is certain to produce indescribable misery, killing by lamplight divers precious faculties which would develop later and become great and powerful. The laws of nature are pitiless, they do not yield at all to the enterprises or wishes of society. In the moral order as in the natural order, every abuse exacts payment for itself. Fruit demanded prematurely from a tree, in a greenhouse, comes at the expense of the tree itself, or of the quality of its product.

La Quintinie killed orange-trees in order to give Louis XIV. a bouquet of flowers every morning throughout the season. It is the same with intellects. The exertion of brain-force demanded of a growing youth is discounting his future. The one essential thing that our epoch lacks is the legislative spirit. Europe has had no true legislators since Jesus Christ, who left His work incomplete because He did not publish His political code. For instance, before the establishment of special schools and their method of recruiting pupils, was the problem considered by any of those great thinkers who carry in their heads a conception of the vast extent of the total relations of any institution with the forces of humanity, who weigh its advantages and inconveniences, who study the laws of the future in the past? Did anyone make investigations as to the fate of those exceptional men who, by a fatal chance, became versed in the science of humanity before their time? Was the scarcity of such men taken account of? Was their end studied? Was any attempt made to ascertain the means by which they were enabled to endure the perpetual pressure of thought? How many, like Pascal, have died prematurely, worn out by their knowledge! Was any inquiry made as to the age at which those who lived many years began their studies? Even as I write, has anyone ever ascertained, does anyone know, the internal arrangement of the brains of those who can endure the premature assault of human knowledge? Does anyone suspect that that question

depends upon the physiology of man, before everything? Well, I believe, now, that the general rule is to remain a long while in the vegetative state of adolescence. In most of those exceptional cases in which the organs are forced in adolescence, the result is a shortening of life. In like manner, the man of genius who objects to the precocious exercise of his faculties must be an exception within an exception. If I am in accord with social facts, and the results of medical observation, the method adopted in France for recruiting the technical schools is a work of distinction after the manner of La Quintinie's, but applied to the noblest subjects in each generation.

"But I continue, and I will subjoin my doubts to each division of facts. Having been admitted to the School, I worked afresh and with much more ardor, in order to end my course as triumphantly as I began. From nineteen to twenty-one, therefore, I developed all my aptitudes, fed my faculties by constant exercise. Those two years were a fitting crown to the first three, during which I had simply prepared to do well. Imagine my pride, therefore, when I had won the right to choose whichever career suited me best, military or naval engineering, the artillery or general staff, the department of mines or of roads and bridges! By your advice, I selected the roads and bridges. But how many young men fail where I triumphed! Do you know that, from year to year, the State increases its scientific requirements with relation to the School, that the

studies become more difficult and less attractive, as time goes on? The preparatory labor which I performed so faithfully was nothing compared to the unremitting study at the School, which is intended to familiarize young men of nineteen to twenty-one years with the whole range of the physical, mathematical, astronomical, and chemical sciences, including their nomenclature. The State, which, in France, seems inclined to substitute itself for the paternal power in many things, is without bowels or paternal feeling; it makes its experiments *in anima vili*. It never asks for the appalling statistics of the misery it has caused; it has not for thirty-six years made any investigations as to the number of brain fevers that declare themselves, or as to the despair that bursts forth among those young men, or the mental ruin that decimates them. I dwell upon this painful side of the question, for it is one of the precedent conditions of the final result: for some weak brains the result is brought nearer instead of being postponed. You know, too, that those youths in whom conception is slow, or who are temporarily benumbed by excessive work, may have to remain at the School three years instead of two, and that they are viewed with a suspicion by no means complimentary to their capacity. Lastly, there is a chance that young men, who may later show themselves to possess superior attainments, may leave the School without employment, because they fail to show the requisite amount of knowledge at the final examinations. They are called *dry fruit*, and Napoléon made sub-lieutenants

of them! To-day the *dry fruit* represents an enormous loss in capital for families, and time lost for the individual. But, at all events, I triumphed! At twenty-one I had mastered mathematical science to the point to which men of genius have developed it, and I was impatient to distinguish myself by continuing their work. That desire is so natural that almost all the pupils, when they leave the School, have their eyes fixed on that moral sun called glory! The first thought of all of us is to be Newtons, Laplaces, or Vaubans. Such are the efforts that France demands of the young man who graduates from that famous School!

"Now let us follow the destinies of these men, selected with so much care from the whole generation. At twenty-one years a young man dreams of his whole life, he expects marvels of himself. I entered the School of Roads and Bridges, I was a pupil in engineering. I studied the science of bridge-building, and with such zeal!—you surely remember. I left the school in 1826, at the age of twenty-four, as yet only a candidate for a position as engineer; the State allowed me a hundred and fifty francs a month. The humblest book-keeper earns that amount at the age of eighteen, in Paris, working only four hours a day. By the most extraordinary good luck, perhaps because of the distinction my faithful study had earned for me, I was appointed an ordinary engineer in 1828, at the age of twenty-six. I was sent to a certain sub-prefecture, you know where, with a salary of twenty-five

hundred francs. The question of money is of no importance. Certainly my lot is more brilliant than could be anticipated for the son of a carpenter; but what grocer's son, planted in a shop at sixteen, would not be on the road to an independent fortune at twenty-six? I understood then to what end that cruel development of the intelligence, those herculean efforts demanded by the State, were directed. The State set me to measuring paving-stones and piles of rocks on the highways. I had to keep in repair and sometimes to build culverts and small one-arched bridges, to lay out driftways, to clean out and sometimes to dig ditches. In the office I had to answer questions concerning highway lines, or the planting and felling of trees. Such are, in fact, the principal and only occupations of ordinary engineers, with the occasional addition of something in the way of levelling, which they compel us to do ourselves, and which the least of our assistants, with his experience alone, always does much better than we, with all our scientific learning. There are nearly four hundred of us ordinary engineers and pupils in engineering, and as there are only a little over a hundred engineers-in-chief, all the ordinary engineers cannot rise to that higher grade; nor is there any rank higher than engineer-in-chief to absorb any of them; for we cannot count as a means of absorption a dozen or fifteen general or divisional inspectorships, officials almost as useless in our corps as colonels are in the artillery, where the battery is the unit. The ordinary engineer,

like the captain of artillery, knows the whole science; there should be nothing above him except a departmental head to connect the eighty-six engineers with the government; for a single engineer, assisted by two students, is enough for a department. The existence of a hierarchy in such corps results in subordinating active talents to old, played-out talents who, believing that they are improving them, change, or ordinarily emasculate, ideas which are submitted to them, perhaps with the sole purpose of not having their own existence threatened; for that seems to me to be the only object served by the General Council of Roads and Bridges in France, so far as its influence upon public works is concerned.

"Let us suppose, however, that when between thirty and forty I become an engineer of the first-class, and engineer-in-chief before I am fifty. Alas! I can see my future, it is written so that my eyes can read it. My engineer-in-chief is sixty years old; he graduated with honor, as I did, from that famous School; he has grown gray in two departments doing what I am doing; he has become the most commonplace man it is possible to imagine; he has fallen from the height to which he had raised himself; more than that, he has not kept abreast of the science: the science has progressed, he has remained stationary; nay, more, he has forgotten what he knew! The man who began at twenty-two, with all the internal symptoms of superior talent, has to-day only the outward appearance of it. In the first place, being specially directed toward the exact sciences and mathematics

by his education, he neglected everything that was not part of *his game*. You cannot imagine how utterly ignorant he is in the other branches of human knowledge. Figuring has withered his heart and his brain. I do not dare whisper to anyone but you the secret of his nonentity, sheltered as it is by the renown of the Polytechnic School. This etiquette is an imposing thing, and, on the faith of prejudice, no one dares suggest a doubt concerning his capacity. To you alone I will say that the loss of such talents as he possessed was responsible for his making the department spend a million instead of two hundred thousand francs on a single contract. I wanted to protest, to open the prefect's eyes; but an engineer who is a friend of mine cited the example of one of our comrades who has become the *bête noire* of the administration for doing a thing of that sort. 'Would you like it very well, if you were engineer-in-chief, to have your mistakes shown up by your subordinate?' he said. 'Your chief will soon be a divisional inspector. As soon as one of us makes a stupid blunder, the government, which can never be in the wrong, withdraws him from active service and makes him an inspector.'—That is how the reward due to talent falls to the lot of no talent. All France saw the disaster that befell the first suspension-bridge that an engineer, a member of the Academy of Sciences, ever tried to construct; it was right in the heart of Paris. It was a deplorable disaster, caused by errors in construction which would not have been made by the builder of the Briare Canal

under Henri IV., nor by the monk who built Pont Royal, and which the government smoothed over by giving that engineer a seat in the General Council. Are the special schools, then, naught but great factories of incapacity? This subject demands extended consideration. If I am right, there should be a reform, in the method of procedure at least, for I dare not suggest a doubt as to the usefulness of the schools. But, if we look back at the past, do we see that France in the old days ever lacked the eminent talents essential for the welfare of the State, such talents as the State would fain produce to-day by the Monge process? Did Vauban graduate from any other School than the great school called vocation? Who was Riquet's teacher? When men of genius, prompted by vocation, rise as they do above their social surroundings, they are almost always completely equipped; in such cases man is not simply a being created for a special purpose, he has the gift of universality. I do not believe that an engineer graduated from the School could ever build one of those miracles of architecture which we owe to Leonardo da Vinci, mechanician, architect, painter, one of the inventors of the science of hydraulics and an indefatigable builder of canals. Trained in their early youth to the strict simplicity of the theorem, the young men whom the School sends out lose the perception of grace and ornamentation; a column seems to them of no use, they go back to the point where art begins, pinning their faith to what is useful. But all this is nothing

compared to the disease that is undermining me! I feel that the most appalling metamorphosis is taking place within me; I feel that my strength and my faculties are diminishing, that, having been stretched beyond endurance, they are giving way. I am allowing the prosaic character of my life to get the better of me. I, who, by the nature of my efforts, sought to create for myself a great destiny, find myself face to face with the most trivial duties, verifying the measure of piles of stones, inspecting roads, checking invoices of supplies. I do not have work enough to employ me two hours a day. I see my colleagues marry, adopt a mode of life contrary to the spirit of modern society. Is my ambition unbounded? I would like to be useful to my country. The country called upon me to put forth my utmost strength; it bade me become one of the representatives of all the sciences, and here I am standing with folded arms in the depths of a province! I am not allowed to leave the district in which I am planted, in order to exert my faculties by devising useful projects. Concealed but real disfavor is the assured reward of that one of us who, yielding to his inspirations, goes beyond what his special service demands of him. In such a case, the favor that a man of superior parts must expect is disregard of his talent, of his presumption, and the interment of his project in the archives at headquarters. What will be the reward of Vicat, the man who is responsible for the only real progress the science of practical construction has made?

"The General Council of Roads and Bridges, composed in part of men worn out by long and sometimes honorable services, but who have no strength left except for negation and who strike out what they are no longer able to understand, is the extinguisher used to annihilate the projects of ambitious minds. That council seems to have been created to paralyze the arms of the noble band of young men who simply ask to work, who wish to serve France! Monstrous things are going on in Paris; the future of a province depends upon the *visa* of those centralizers who, by intrigues which I have not time to describe, check the execution of the best plans; the best being those which offer the most resistance to the avidity of companies or speculators, which clash with or overturn the greatest number of abuses, and abuses are always stronger in France than reforms. Five years hence I shall cease to be myself, I shall see the extinction of my ambition, of my noble desire to employ the faculties which my country has asked me to develop, and which will rust in the obscure corner where I live. Reckoning upon the most fortunate chances, the future seems to me to have little in store.

"I have taken advantage of a furlough to come to Paris; I wish to change my occupation, to find an opportunity to employ my energy, my activity, and my knowledge. I will send in my resignation, I will go into the provinces where men of my special class are lacking, and where such men may be able to accomplish great things. If nothing of the sort

is possible, I will take hold of one of the new doctrines which seem likely to bring about important changes in the present social order, by more judicious direction of the workers. What are we, if not workers without work, tools in a storehouse? We are organized as if it were our province to move the globe, and we have nothing to do! I feel within me something great which is growing smaller, which is at the point of death, and I tell you so with mathematical frankness.

"Before changing my condition, I would like to have your opinion; I look upon myself as your child, and I shall never take any important step without submitting it to you, for your experience equals your kindness. I am perfectly well aware that the State, after obtaining the men of special qualifications, cannot invent monuments to be reared for their express benefit; it has not three hundred bridges a year to be built, and it can no more order monuments constructed for the benefit of its engineers than it can declare war in order to make an opportunity for officers to win battles and blossom out as great captains; but that being so, as the man of genius has never failed to appear when circumstances called for him, as, whenever there is much money to be spent or great things to be accomplished, one of those unique men always comes forth from the crowd, and as, in that class especially, one Vauban is enough, nothing shows more conclusively the uselessness of the institution. And then, too, when they have spurred such a man on by so

many preparations, how can they fail to understand that he will struggle manfully before allowing himself to be thrust out of sight? Is that a wise policy? Is it not fanning ambitions already ablaze? Have they told all those effervescing brains that they must be able to calculate everything except their own destinies? And so it is that, among those six hundred young men, there are exceptions, strong men who resist their demonetization, and I know some of them; but, if I could describe their struggle with men and things, when, armed with useful projects, with conceptions calculated to engender life and wealth in lifeless districts, they encounter obstacles where the State has supposed that it was providing them with aid and protection,—you would consider the forceful man, the man of talent, the man whose nature is a miracle, a hundred times more unfortunate and more to be pitied than the man whose debased nature lends itself to the degeneration of its faculties. So I prefer to direct a commercial and industrial enterprise, to live upon little or nothing, seeking to solve one of the numerous problems which industry and society still need to have solved, rather than remain in my present position. You will tell me that there is nothing to prevent me from employing my intellectual powers where I am, from seeking in the silence of this uninteresting life the solution of some problem of importance to humanity. Ah! monsieur, do you not know the influence of the provinces and the relaxing effect of a life just enough employed to use up the

time in almost futile efforts, and yet not enough to call forth the rich resources our nature has created? Do not, my dear protector, believe me to be devoured by a longing to make my fortune or by any insensate thirst for glory. I am too much of a calculator to be ignorant of the emptiness of glory. Such energy as is essential for this life does not make me wish to marry, for, when I consider my present destiny, I have not sufficient regard for existence to make any such melancholy present to another myself. Although I look upon money as one of the most potent means of action given to man as a unit of society, it is, after all, nothing more than a means of action. Therefore my only pleasure consists in the certainty of being useful to my country. My greatest joy would be to act in an environment adapted to my faculties. If in your neighborhood, in the circle of your acquaintances, in the sphere in which you shine, you should hear anyone mention an enterprise that demands any of the acquirements you know me to possess, will you let me know? I will wait six months for a reply from you.

"Others think as I have written, monsieur and dear friend. I have seen many of my comrades or former pupils at the School caught, like myself, in the trap of a specialty, engineer-geographers, captain-professors, captains in the military engineering corps, who feel that they are captains for the rest of their days, and who bitterly regret not having gone into active service. In fact, on several occasions, we have admitted to one another the long-continued

mystification of which we have been made victims, and which becomes evident when it is too late to escape from its influence, when the animal has become used to the machine which he turns round and round, when the invalid is accustomed to his disease. Having closely studied those deplorable results, I put the following questions to myself and I repeat them to you, a man of sound common sense and capable of giving them mature consideration, knowing that they are the fruit of meditations purged in the fire of suffering. What end has the State in view? Does it wish to obtain the services of men of capacity? The means employed work directly against the end: it has unquestionably created the most downright mediocrities which a government hostile to superior talent could desire. Does it wish to provide a career for distinguished intellects? It has provided a most mediocre position for them: there is not one of the men graduated from the schools who does not regret, between the ages of fifty and sixty, that he ever fell into the snare concealed by the promises of the State. Does the State wish to obtain men of genius? What one man of eminent talent have the schools produced since 1790? Except for Napoléon, would Cachin, the engineering genius to whom we owe Cherbourg, ever have been heard of? The imperial despotism honored him, the constitutional régime would have stifled him. Does the Academy of Sciences include many men graduated from the special schools? Perhaps there are two or three! The man of genius will

always make himself manifest outside of the special schools. In the sciences to which those schools are devoted, genius obeys no laws but its own, it is developed only by circumstances over which man has no control: neither the State, nor the science of mankind,—anthropology,—knows anything of them. Riquet, Perronet, Leonardo da Vinci, Cachin, Palladio, Brunelleschi, Michael-Angelo, Bramante, Vauban, Vicat, all owe their genius to unobserved, preliminary causes, to which we give the name of chance, the watchword of fools. Never do such sublime workmen as they fail their generation, with or without schools. Now, is it a fact that, by means of this organization, the State is the gainer by the better or less extravagant execution of works of public utility? In the first place, private undertakings do very well without engineers; furthermore, the works undertaken by our government are executed in the most expensive way, to say nothing of the cost of the enormous staff of the department of Roads and Bridges. In other countries, Germany, England, Italy, where such institutions as these do not exist, similar works are constructed at least as well and at much less expense than in France. Those three countries are renowned for novel and useful inventions in that line. I know that it is fashionable, in speaking of our schools, to say that Europe envies us. But, for the last fifteen years, Europe, which is constantly watching us, has established nothing of the same sort. England, that shrewd reckoner, has better schools among her artisan population, from

which practical men suddenly step forth and become great in a moment, when they proceed from practice to theory. Stephenson and Macadam were not products of our famous schools. But of what use is it to talk? When young and skilful engineers, full of fire and ardor, have at the very outset of their career solved the problem of keeping the highways of France in condition, a problem which requires the expenditure of hundreds of millions in a quarter of a century,—which highways are in a pitiable condition,—it is of no use for them to publish learned works and memorials; everything is swallowed at general headquarters, in that Parisian centre where everything goes in and from which nothing comes out, where old men are jealous of young men, where the higher positions are used as places of retirement for the old engineers who have lost their wits. That is why, with a thoroughly educated corps scattered over the whole of France, a corps which forms one of the wheels in the administrative machine, and which ought to lead the country in such matters and enlighten it upon the great questions within its jurisdiction, it will happen that we are still discussing the question of railroads when other countries have finished building theirs. Now, if France had ever been able to demonstrate the excellence of the institution of special schools, would it not have been in its treatment of that superb branch of public works, destined to change the face of the globe, to double the duration of human life by modifying the laws of time and space? Belgium, the United States, Germany,

England, none of which have a Polytechnic School, will be covered with a network of railways when our engineers are still laying out the lines of ours, when shameful speculations, concealed behind projects for the construction of lines, will retard their execution. Not a stone is laid in France until half a score of Parisian scribblers have made foolish and utterly useless reports. Thus, so far as the State is concerned, it derives no profit from its special schools; as for the individual, his fortune is mediocre, his life a cruel disappointment. Certainly the talents that the pupil has displayed between the ages of sixteen and twenty-six prove that, if left to carve out his own destiny, he would have made it greater and richer than that to which the government has doomed him. As merchant, scientist, soldier, that master-mind would have acted in a wide sphere, if his priceless faculties and his zeal had not been idiotically and prematurely emasculated. Where is the progress, then? The State and the man certainly lose by the present system. A half-century's experience certainly demands changes in the method of conducting an institution, does it not? What priesthood sets forth the necessity of selecting from a whole generation in France the men destined to constitute the learned portion of the nation? What studies ought not those great priests of fate to have pursued? It may be that mathematical knowledge is not so necessary to them as physiological knowledge. Does it not seem to you that there is an opening for a little of that second-sight which is the magic of great

men? The examiners are former professors, honorable men grown old in toil, whose duties are confined to discovering the best memories: they are not capable of doing anything more than just what is asked of them. Assuredly, their functions should be considered the most important in the State, and should call for men of extraordinary merit.

"Do not think, monsieur and dear friend, that my animadversions refer simply to the School of which I am a graduate; they are aimed not only at the institution itself, but also, and especially, at the method employed to feed it. That method is *competition*, a modern invention, essentially bad, and bad not in science alone, but wherever it is employed, in the arts, in every case of selection between men, projects, or things. If it is unfortunate for our famous schools that they have turned out no larger numbers of superior men than any other collection of young men would have done, it is still more shameful that the first great prize competitions of the institute have produced neither a great painter, a great musician, a great architect, nor a great sculptor; just as, for twenty years past, the elections have not brought into the government, from among the flood of mediocrities, a single great statesman. My observation has detected an error which vitiates both education and politics in France. That grave error rests upon the following principle, which the organizers have failed to understand:

"Nothing, either in past experience or in the nature of things, affords a certainty that the intellectual qualities of the youth will be those of the matured man.

"At this moment, I am on intimate terms with several distinguished men who have made a study of all the moral diseases by which France is consumed. They have realized, as I have, that the superior schools turn out men whose capabilities are only temporary, because they are without employment or future prospects; that the knowledge imparted by the inferior schools is of no benefit to the State, because its recipients are devoid of conviction and feeling. Our whole system of public instruction demands a thorough overhauling, which should be presided over by a man of profound knowledge, of a powerful will, and endowed with that genius for legislation which no man of modern times has possessed, except, perhaps, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It may be that the overflow from the special schools should be employed in elementary instruction, so necessary to the welfare of a people. We have not enough patient, devoted teachers to handle those masses. The deplorable number of crimes and misdemeanors indicates a social sore whose source is in that semi-instruction afforded the people, which tends to destroy the social bond, by causing them to reflect just enough to desert the religious beliefs favorable to the government, and not enough to educate them up to the theory of obedience and duty, which is the last word of transcendental philosophy. It is impossible to make a whole nation

study Kant; so that belief and usage are much better for the masses than study and argument. If I had to begin life anew, I might, perhaps, enter a seminary, and I would like to be a simple country curé, or the school-teacher of a commune. I am too far advanced now in my profession to be a simple primary teacher, and I am fitted to act upon a more extended circle than that of a country school or curacy. The Saint-Simonians, whom I was tempted to join, propose to take a course in which I could not follow them; but, despite their errors, they have put their fingers on several sore spots, the result of our legislation, which no attempt is made to cure except by insufficient palliatives, which will only serve to postpone a great moral and political crisis in France. Adieu, dear monsieur; I trust that you will find herein the assurance of my respectful and faithful attachment, which, notwithstanding these observations, can never do aught but increase.

"GREGOIRE GERARD."

According to his old banker's habit, Grossetête had minuted the following reply on the back of the letter, placing above what he had written the sacramental word: "ANSWERED":

"It is quite useless, my dear Gérard, to discuss the observations contained in your letter, because, by a freak of chance,—I use the watchword of fools,—I have a proposition to make to you, the result of

which will be to relieve you from the situation in which you are so unhappy. Madame Graslin, who owns the forests of Montégnac and a very unproductive plateau which lies at the foot of the long chain of hills which her forests cover, has conceived the idea of turning that extensive property to some profitable use, of exploiting its woods, and of cultivating its rocky plains. To carry out that idea, she needs a man with your scientific knowledge and your ardor, who will have at the same time your disinterested devotion and your practical utilitarian ideas. Little money and plenty of work to do! an immense result to be achieved by small means! a whole district to be revolutionized! To cause the most barren spot on earth to yield abundantly—is not that what you desire, you who long to construct a poem? In view of the tone of sincerity that pervades your letter, I do not hesitate to tell you to come to see me at Limoges; but, my friend, do not send in your resignation, simply obtain permission to leave your corps, explaining to your superiors that you wish to study questions connected with your profession outside of government work. In that way you will lose none of your rights, and you will have time to make up your mind whether the project conceived by the curé of Montégnac, which commends itself to Madame Graslin, is practicable. I will explain to you when I see you the advantages that may accrue to you in case these vast changes are possible. Rely always upon the friendship of your devoted

"GROSSETÊTE."

Madame Graslin wrote to Grossetête in reply only these few words:

"Thanks, my friend; I await your protégé."

She showed the engineer's letter to Monsieur Bonnet, saying:

"One more wounded man in search of the great hospital!"

The curé read the letter, re-read it, walked up and down the terrace two or three times in silence, and returned it to Madame Graslin.

"That is the letter of a noble mind," he said, "and a superior man! He says that the schools invented by the revolutionary genius manufacture incapacities; for my part, I call them factories of unbelievers, for, if Monsieur Gérard is not an atheist, he is a Protestant."

"We will ask him the question," she said, struck by that rejoinder.

A fortnight later, in December, Monsieur Grossetête came to the château of Montégnac, in spite of the cold, to present his protégé, whom Véronique and Monsieur Bonnet were impatiently awaiting.

"You see how fond of you I must be, my child," said the old man, taking both Véronique's hands in his and kissing them with the old-fashioned gallantry that never offends a woman, "yes, very fond, indeed, to leave Limoges in such weather; but I was determined to present Monsieur Grégoire Gérard to you with my own hand, and here he is.—He is a

man after your own heart, Monsieur Bonnet," added the ex-banker, saluting the curé affectionately.

Gérard's exterior was far from engaging. Of medium height, thick-set, with his neck between his shoulders, as the phrase goes, he had golden-yellow hair, the red eyes of the albino, lashes and eyebrows almost white. Although his complexion, like that of all people of that sort, was of a dazzling whiteness, marks of the small-pox and some very apparent scars took away its original brilliancy; study had evidently impaired his sight, for he wore spectacles. When he threw off a heavy gendarme's cloak, the costume that he disclosed did not redeem the unattractiveness of his countenance. The way in which his clothes were put on and buttoned, his shabby cravat, his soiled shirt, plainly denoted that lack of care of the person which is the common reproach of scientific men, all more or less absent-minded. As in almost all thinkers, his manner and his attitude, the development of the bust and the thinness of the legs indicated a sort of bodily weakness produced by meditative habits; but the power of the heart and the ardor of the intelligence, the proofs of which were written in his letter, made themselves manifest on his brow, which you would have taken to be carved from Carrara marble. Nature seemed to have set aside that place for the visible tokens of the man's grandeur, constancy, and kindness of heart. The nose, as in all men of the Gallic race, was somewhat flattened. His firm, straight mouth denoted absolute discretion and an economical bent;

but the whole face, wearied by study, had grown old prematurely.

"We have occasion to thank you already, monsieur," said Madame Graslin, "for your willingness to come and assume the direction of works in a region that will afford you no other pleasure than the satisfaction of knowing that one can do good here."

"Madame," he replied, "Monsieur Grossetête told me enough about you on the road to make me more than happy to be of use to you, and to make the prospect of living in your society and that of Monsieur Bonnet delightful to me. Unless I am driven away from the province, I expect to pass the rest of my life here."

"We will try to give you no reason to change your plan," said Madame Graslin, with a smile.

"Here," said Grossetête to Véronique, taking her aside, "are some papers the procureur-général handed me; he was very much surprised that you did not apply to him directly. All that you asked has been done promptly and zealously. In the first place, your protégé will be restored to all his rights as a citizen; and secondly, Catherine Curieux will be sent to you within three months."

"Where is she?" Véronique asked.

"At the Saint-Louis hospital," replied the old man. "They are waiting for her to be cured before sending her away from Paris."

"Ah! the poor girl is ill!"

"You will find here all the information you desire," said Grossetête, handing a package to Véronique.

She returned to her guests to take them to the superb dining-room on the ground-floor, to which she led the way with Grossetête and Gérard, to each of whom she gave an arm. She served the dinner herself, taking no part in it. Since her arrival at Montégnac, she had made it an invariable rule to take all her meals alone, and Aline, who was the only one who knew the secret of that reserve, kept it religiously until the day that her mistress was in danger of death.

The mayor, the justice of the peace, and the physician of Montégnac had naturally been invited.

The physician, a young man of twenty-seven, named Roubaud, was extremely anxious to know the most famous woman in the Limousin. The curé was the more pleased to introduce that young man at the château, because he desired to form a sort of society for Véronique, in order to divert her and to furnish food for her mind. Roubaud was one of those thoroughly educated young doctors, of the sort that are turned out to-day by the School of Medicine at Paris, and would certainly have been able to make his mark upon the vast stage of the capital; but, alarmed by the scheming of ambitious practitioners there, conscious, too, that he was better posted in medicine than in intrigue, that he possessed more professional skill than greed, his peaceable character had led him to the narrow provincial stage, where he hoped to be appreciated more speedily than in Paris. At Limoges, Roubaud jostled against habits long formed and physicians whose practice was impregnable; so he

allowed himself to be persuaded by Monsieur Bonnet who judged from his sweet and attractive face that he was one of those who ought to belong to him and to co-operate in his work.

Roubaud was a small, fair-haired man, with a decidedly insipid face; but his gray eyes betrayed the profound meditation of the physiologist and the tenacity of studious folk. Montégnac could boast only of a regimental surgeon, who was more devoted to his cellar than his patients, and, furthermore, was too old to continue the exacting profession of country doctor. At the time of which we write he was dying. Roubaud had lived in Montégnac eighteen months, and had made himself beloved there. But the young pupil of Desplein and of the successors of Cabanis did not believe in Catholicism. On the subject of religion, he remained in a state of fatal indifference, and did not choose to emerge from it. So he drove the curé to despair; not that he did the slightest harm, for he never talked religion, his occupations justified his constant absence from church, and, moreover, being quite incapable of proselyting, he bore himself as the best of Catholics; but he had forbidden himself to consider a problem which he looked upon as beyond the reach of man. When he heard the doctor say that pantheism was the religion of all great minds, the curé concluded that he was inclined toward the dogmas of Pythagoras concerning transformations.

Roubaud, who then saw Madame Graslin for the first time, was conscious of a most violent emotion

at her appearance; science enabled him to detect in her expression, in her attitude, in her worn features, incredible suffering, both mental and physical, a character of superhuman strength, and the eminent faculties which enable their possessor to endure the most contrary vicissitudes, he saw everything, even the obscure and designedly hidden spaces. And so he discovered the disease that was devouring that noble creature's heart; for just as the color of a fruit causes us to suspect the presence of a worm, so certain hues of the face enable a physician to detect a poisonous thought. From that moment, Monsieur Roubaud became so deeply attached to Madame Graslin that he was afraid of loving her beyond the simple friendship permitted. Véronique's forehead, her gait, and, more than all else, her glance had an eloquence which men always understand, and which said as emphatically that she was dead to love as other women say the contrary by eloquence of a contrary disposition; the doctor suddenly made a vow of knightly devotion to her. He exchanged a swift glance with the curé. Thereupon Monsieur Bonnet said to himself:

"There is the thunderbolt that will transform that poor unbeliever! Madame Graslin will be more eloquent than I."

The mayor, an old countryman, agape at the magnificence of that dining-room, and surprised at being invited to dine with one of the richest men in the department, had donned his best clothes, but he was somewhat uncomfortable in them, and his

mental discomfort steadily increased; Madame Graslin, in her mourning, seemed to him an extremely imposing personage, so that he was dumb. Formerly a farmer at Saint-Léonard, he had purchased the only habitable house in the village, and he himself cultivated the fields connected with it. Although he knew how to read and write, he could not perform the duties of his office except with the assistance of the bailiff and the justice of the peace, who laid out his work for him: so that he earnestly desired the creation of a notarial office, in order to unload the burden of his functions upon that ministerial officer; but the poverty of the canton of Montégnac made a notary almost useless there, and the needs of the people were served by the notaries of the chief town of the arrondissement.

The justice of the peace, one Clousier, was formerly an advocate at Limoges, where causes had turned their backs upon him, for he attempted to put in practice the excellent axiom that the lawyer is the first judge of client and cause. About 1809 he obtained the place he now held: its meagre salary afforded him a bare living. Thus he had arrived at the most honorable but the most utter poverty. After a residence of twenty-two years in that poor commune, the good man had become a thorough rustic, and, with the exception of his redingote, resembled the farmers of the province. Beneath that semi-coarse exterior, Clousier concealed a far-seeing mind, devoted to lofty political meditations, but fallen into an utter indifference due to his perfect

knowledge of men and their selfishness. That man, who for a long time deceived the perspicacity of Monsieur Bonnet, and who, in a higher sphere, would have recalled the character of L'Hôpital, being utterly incapable of intrigue, like all men of really profound mind, had at last reached the contemplative stage of the recluses of old days. Esteeming himself rich, doubtless, in the privations he had undergone, he allowed no consideration of self-interest to act upon his mind: he knew the laws and passed judgment impartially. His life, reduced to the simplest necessaries, was pure and regular. The peasants loved Monsieur Clousier and esteemed him, because of the paternal disinterestedness with which he adjusted their differences and gave them his advice on the most trivial subjects. Goodman Clousier, as all Montégnac called him, had had for his clerk for two years past one of his nephews, a young man of intelligence, who, later, contributed materially to the prosperity of the canton.

The old man's face was remarkable for a broad, expansive forehead. Two bushes of white hair grew in disorder on each side of his bald head. His florid complexion, his decided embonpoint would have led one to believe, despite his sobriety, that he cultivated Bacchus as ardently as Troplong and Toullier. His almost inaudible voice denoted that he was a sufferer from asthma. Perhaps the dry air of upper Montégnac had had something to do with his permanent settlement in that district. He lived in a small house arranged for his occupancy by a cobbler of some

means, to whom it belonged. Clousier had previously seen Véronique at church and had made up his mind concerning her, but had not communicated his ideas to anyone, not even to Monsieur Bonnet, with whom he was beginning to become somewhat intimate. For the first time in his life, the justice of the peace was with people who were capable of understanding him.

When they were seated around a handsomely appointed table, for Véronique had had all her furniture sent from Limoges to Montégnac, these six persons experienced a momentary embarrassment. The doctor, the mayor, and the justice of the peace knew neither Grossetête nor Gérard. But, during the first course, the old banker's good humor gradually melted the ice of a first meeting. Then, too, Madame Graslin's amiable manner drew out Gérard and encouraged Monsieur Roubaud. Skilfully handled by her, those minds, stored with excellent qualities, recognized their kinship. Everyone soon felt that he was in sympathetic surroundings. So that, when the dessert came on, when the glasses and the gilt-edged porcelain gleamed in the candle-light, when choice wines passed around the board, served by Aline, Champion, and Grossetête's servant, the conversation became sufficiently general for those four first-rate men, brought together by chance, to exchange their real thoughts concerning the important matters which people love to discuss when they feel that they are all speaking in good faith.

"Your furlough coincided with the revolution of

July," said Grossetête to Gérard, in a tone which seemed to ask him for his opinion of that event.

"Yes," replied the engineer. "I was in Paris during the three famous days, I saw everything; I formed some rather depressing conclusions."

"What were they?" said Monsieur Bonnet, eagerly.

"There is no patriotism nowadays except under soiled shirts," rejoined Gérard. "There is the misfortune of France. July was the voluntary overthrow of those men who are superior in name, fortune, and talent. The enthusiastic masses carried the day over the rich and intelligent classes to whom enthusiasm is antipathetic."

"To judge from what has happened since a year ago," added Monsieur Clousier, the justice of the peace, "that change is a premium offered to the evil that is devouring us, individualism. Fifteen years hence, every generous question will be translated: '*What difference does it make to me?*' the great cry of free-will, descended from the religious heights to which Luther, Calvin, Zwingle, and Knox raised it in political economy. '*Chacun pour soi; chacun chez soi,*'* those two horrible phrases, form, with the '*What difference does it make to me?*' the trinity of wise precepts of the bourgeois and small landed proprietor. This selfishness is the result of the vices of

* Literally, "every one for himself; every one at home." These phrases are contemptuously regarded as being the maxims of a selfish and narrow-minded national policy. The latter, '*chacun chez soi*,' is particularly odious, implying that France should let other nations pull themselves out of the mire while she should look on with indifference.

our civil legislation, which was enacted a little too hurriedly, and received a terrible consecration in the revolution of July."

The justice of the peace relapsed into his customary silence after that speech, which was well adapted to furnish food for thought to the guests. Emboldened by Clousier's words and by the look which Gérard and Grossetête exchanged, Monsieur Bonnet ventured to go still further.

"The good King Charles X.," he said, "failed in the most far-sighted and salutary enterprise that a monarch ever conceived for the welfare of the people entrusted to his care, and the Church may well be proud of her part in his councils. But courage and intelligence failed the upper classes, just as they had failed them before, concerning the great question of the law of primogeniture, the everlasting honor of the only courageous statesman of the Restoration, the Comte de Peyronnet. To reconstitute the nation by the family, to take away from the press its venomous activity by limiting its privileges to that of being useful, to compel the elective Chamber to confine itself to its proper attributes, to restore to religion its power over the people,—such were the four cardinal points of the domestic policy of the house of Bourbon. And, twenty years hence, all France will have recognized the necessity of that grand and healthy policy. King Charles X. was, moreover, more threatened in the position which he proposed to abandon, than in that wherein his paternal power perished. The future of our fair country, where

everything will be periodically discussed, where discussion will constantly take the place of action, where the press, become the sovereign power, will be the instrument of the vilest ambitions, will demonstrate the wisdom of that king who has carried away with him the true principles of government, and history will give him credit for the courage with which he resisted his best friends after he had probed the sore, had realized its extent and the necessity of those curative methods which were not upheld by those in whose interest he threw himself into the breach."

"Well, well, monsieur le curé, you go to the point frankly and without the slightest disguise," cried Gérard; "but I will not contradict you. Napoléon, in his Russian campaign, was forty years ahead of the spirit of his age; he was not understood. The Russia and the England of 1830 explain the campaign of 1812. Charles X. suffered from the same misfortune; twenty-five years hence his ordinances may become laws."

"France," rejoined the justice of the peace, "a too eloquent country not to be inclined to talk too much, too full of vanity to enable one to discover its real talents, is, notwithstanding the sublime good sense of its language and the masses of its people, the last country in the world in which the system of two deliberative assemblies should be adopted. At the very least, the disadvantages of our character should be neutralized by the admirable restrictions which Napoléon's experience led him to

introduce. That system may still work well in a country whose action is circumscribed by the nature of its boundaries, as in England; but the law of primogeniture, as applied to the descent of real estate, is always essential, and when that law is set aside, the representative system becomes sheer nonsense. England owes its existence to the quasi-feudal law which hands down the real estate and the family homestead to the eldest son. Russia is founded upon the feudal law of autocracy. So that those two nations are making appallingly rapid progress to-day. Austria was able to resist our invasion and to renew the war against Napoléon solely by virtue of that same law of primogeniture, which keeps the family influences at work and maintains intact the great landed estates that are so essential to the welfare of the State. The house of Bourbon, feeling that it was being forced back into the third rank of European powers through the fault of liberalism, tried to hold its place, and the country overthrew it at the very moment that it was saving the country. I do not know how far down the present system will carry us."

"If war comes, France will be without horses as Napoléon was in 1813, when, being reduced to the product of France alone, he was unable to take advantage of the victories of Lutzen and Bautzen, and was crushed at Leipsic!" cried Grossetête. "If peace continues, the evil will increase all the time: in twenty-five years cattle and horses will have diminished by half in France."

"Monsieur Grossetête is right," said Gérard.—"And so, madame," he added, addressing Véronique, "the work which you propose to undertake here will be a great service to the country."

"Yes," said the justice of the peace, "because madame has only one son. Will that fortunate condition of things be perpetuated? During a considerable number of years, the great and magnificent stock-farm which you will succeed, let us hope, in establishing here, belonging to a single person, will continue to produce horses and horned beasts. But, in spite of everything, the day will come when forests and fields will be either divided or sold in lots. By successive subdivisions, the six thousand acres of your plain will, eventually belong to a thousand or twelve hundred owners, and then no more horses or cattle."

"Oh! when that time comes—" began the mayor.

"Do you hear the '*What difference does it make to me?*' that Monsieur Clousier referred to?" cried Monsieur Grossetête; "there it is, caught in the act.—Why, monsieur," he added, in a serious tone, addressing the stupefied mayor, "that time has come! Within a radius of ten leagues around Paris the country has been so divided and subdivided that it will scarcely furnish pasturage for milch cows. The commune of Argenteuil contains thirty-eight thousand eight hundred and eighty-five distinct parcels of land, some of which do not yield fifteen centimes a year! If it were not for the rich manure they get from Paris, which enables them to raise

fodder of superior quality, I don't see how the milkmen could get along. Even as it is now, that rich food and keeping the cows in the shed make them subject to inflammatory troubles. Cows are used up in the neighborhood of Paris, just as horses are used up in the streets. Crops more lucrative than hay—vegetables, fruit, nurseries, vineyards—are reducing the grass-fields to infinitesimal proportions. A few years more and milk will come to Paris by the mail-coach as fish comes now. The same thing that is taking place around Paris is taking place in the outskirts of all the large cities. The evil of the excessive subdivision of estates prevails around a hundred cities in France, and will soon consume it altogether. According to Chaptal, there were, in 1800, hardly two million hectares in vineyards; accurate statistics would show at least ten millions to-day. Subdivided *ad infinitum* by our system of succession, Normandie will lose half of its output of horses and cattle; but it will have a monopoly in milk in Paris, for its climate is fortunately opposed to the cultivation of the vine. The constant rise in the price of meat will be a curious phenomenon. In 1850, twenty years hence, Paris, which paid from seven to eleven sous a pound in 1814, will pay twenty sous, unless a man comes forward who is able to carry out the idea of Charles X."

"You have put your finger on the great sore of France," said the justice of the peace. "The cause of the trouble is to be found in the title *Successions* of the Civil Code, which provides for the equal

distribution of property. There is the pestle whose constant working crumbles up the territory, individualizes fortunes by depriving them of the necessary stability, and, by disintegrating without ever reconstructing, will end by destroying France. The French Revolution emitted a destructive virus to which the three days of July have imparted renewed activity. That morbific principle is the accession of the peasant to land-ownership. If the chapter of *Successions* is the active principle of the disease, the peasant is its means of contagion. The peasant gives back no part of what he has gained. When that ogre has once taken a parcel of land in his always open maw, he subdivides it so long as three furrows remain. Even then he doesn't stop! He divides the three furrows in their length, as monsieur has just shown you by the example of the commune of Argenteuil. The absurd value that the peasant attaches to the smallest parcels makes the reconstitution of the original estate impossible. In the first place, law and procedure are annulled by this subdivision, property becomes an absurdity. But it is nothing to see the treasury and the law lose their power over parcels which make their wisest provisions of no effect; there are much greater evils than that. There are landed proprietors with incomes of fifteen and twenty-five centimes!—Monsieur," said Clousier, pointing to Grossetête, "has spoken of the diminution of horses and cattle: the present laws are responsible for a great part of it. The peasant proprietor has nothing but cows, he

gets his living from them, he sells calves, he sells butter; it does not occur to him to raise oxen, much less horses, but, as he never raises enough fodder to carry him through a year of drought, he sends his cows to market when he can no longer feed them. If, by a fatal chance, the hay-crop should fail two years in succession, you would see extraordinary changes in the price of beef, and even more in the price of veal, in Paris, during the third year."

"In that case, how shall we be able to give patriotic banquets?" said the doctor, with a smile.

"Oh!" cried Madame Graslin, with a glance at Roubaud, "cannot politics dispense with the petty newspaper anywhere, even here?"

"The bourgeoisie," continued Clousier, "play the part of the American pioneer in this horrible condition of affairs. They purchase great estates, with which the peasant can do nothing, and divide them up among themselves; then, after they have been well masticated and subdivided, sales by auction in small lots turn them over to the peasant sooner or later. Everything is expressed in figures to-day. I know none more eloquent than these: France contains forty-nine millions of hectares which it would be advisable to reduce to forty; we must subtract from it the main highways and other roads, sand-dunes, canals, unproductive and wild land, and land deserted by capital, like the plain of Montégnac. Now, in these forty millions of hectares for thirty-two million inhabitants, there are one hundred and twenty-five millions of separate parcels on the list of

taxed estates. I have omitted fractions. Thus we have gone beyond the agrarian law and we are not at the end either of destitution or discord! The men who divide the land into crumbs and diminish production will have organs to cry out that true social justice would consist in not giving to anyone more than the usufruct of his estate. They will say that perpetual ownership is a theft! The Saint-Simonians have made a beginning."

"The magistrate has spoken," said Grossetête; "this is what the banker has to add to his courageous observations. The throwing open of land ownership to the peasant and the petty bourgeois has done France an immense injury which the government does not even suspect. We may reckon at three millions of families the great bulk of the peasantry, making due allowance for paupers. Those families live on wages. Wages are paid in money instead of in kind—"

"Another tremendous mistake in our laws!" cried Clousier, interrupting him. "The right to pay in kind could be established in 1790; but to pass such a law to-day would be to risk a revolution."

"And so," continued Grossetête, "the proletariat attracts all the money of the country. Now the peasant has no other passion, no other longing, no other wish, no other aim, than to die a landed proprietor. That desire, as Monsieur Clousier has well set forth, was born of the Revolution; it is the result of the sale of national property. One can have no idea of what is going on in the heart of the country

districts, not to admit as a constant fact, that those three millions of families hoard up fifty francs each annually, and thus remove a hundred and fifty millions of money from circulation. The science of political economy has placed in the category of axioms the fact that a five-franc piece, which passes through a hundred hands in a day, is positively the equivalent of five hundred francs. Now, it is certain to us old observers of the state of the country districts, that the peasant selects his land; he watches it and attends to it, and never invests his capital. Purchases by peasants should be calculated by periods of seven years. Thus peasants leave eleven hundred millions unproductive and quiescent for seven years; but, as the petty bourgeoisie hoards as much more and acts in the same way with regard to estates which are out of the peasant's reach, in forty-two years France loses the interest on at least two billions,—that is to say, about a hundred millions in seven years or six hundred millions in forty-two years. But it does not lose simply those six hundred millions, for it has failed to invest six hundred millions in industrial or agricultural enterprises, which failure represents a loss of twelve hundred millions; for if the industrial product were not worth twice its net cost in cash, commerce could not exist. The common people deprive themselves of six hundred millions in wages! Those six hundred millions of clear loss—which, to a strict economist, represent a loss of about twelve hundred millions because of the benefit that would be derived from having the

money in circulation—explain the inferior condition of our commerce, our agriculture, and our navy, compared with those of England. Notwithstanding the difference between the respective possessions of the two countries,—a difference in our favor in the ratio of more than two to one,—England could equip the cavalry for two French army corps, and enough fresh meat is produced there for the whole world. But in that country, as the tax on real estate makes its acquisition almost impossible for the lower classes, every piece of money goes into business and circulates. Thus, in addition to the curse of excessive subdivision of estates and that of the diminution of the output of cattle, horses, and sheep, the chapter on *Successions* is also responsible for a loss of six hundred millions by the hoarding of the capital of the peasant and bourgeois, twelve hundred millions in curtailment of production, or three billions of non-circulation in a half-century!"

"The moral effect is worse than the material effect!" cried the curé. "We manufacture land-owners who go about begging among the people, semi-learned men among the petty bourgeois; and the '*Chacun chez soi; chacun pour soi*,' which had produced its effect upon the upper classes in July of last year, will soon have infected the middle classes. A proletariat accustomed to do without feelings, with no other god than envy, with no other fanaticism than the despair caused by hunger, without faith or belief, will come forward and put its foot on the country's heart. The stranger, grown great under

monarchical institutions, will find us with a kingdom but no king, with legality but no laws, with property but no proprietors, with elections but no government, with freedom of will but no strength, with equality but no happiness. Let us hope that, ere that day comes, God will raise up a providential man in France, one of those elect who impart a new spirit to nations; and that, whether he be a Marius or a Sylla, whether he rises from below or descends from above, he will remodel society."

"We shall begin by sending him to the police court or the assizes," rejoined Gérard. "The judgment of Socrates and that of Jesus Christ would be given against him in 1831, as in the old days at Jerusalem and in Attica. To-day, as formerly, jealous mediocrities leave thinkers to die in their poverty, although they are the great political physicians who have studied the diseases of France, and who hold out against the spirit of their age. If they do not succumb to want, we turn them to ridicule or treat them as dreamers. In France it is fashionable to rebel against the great man of the future in the moral order, just as it is to rebel against the sovereign in the political order."

"In the old days the sophists spoke to a small number of men only; to-day the periodical press enables them to lead a whole nation astray," cried the justice of the peace; "and the portion of the press that pleads for common sense finds no echo!"

The mayor gazed at Monsieur Clousier in profound amazement. Madame Graslin, overjoyed to find in

a simple justice of the peace a man whose mind was bent upon such serious questions, said to Monsieur Roubaud, her neighbor:

"Would you know Monsieur Clousier?"

"I did not really know him until to-day. Madame, you perform miracles!" he said in her ear. "But look at his forehead: what a beautiful shape! Does it not resemble the classic or traditional forehead given by sculptors to Lycurgus and the sages of Greece?—Evidently the revolution of July has an anti-political meaning," he said, aloud, having digested the figures given by Grossetête, that former student, who might, perhaps, have helped throw up a barricade.

"It has a threefold meaning," said Clousier. "You have covered its bearing upon law and finance, but this is what it has to say concerning the government. The royal power, weakened by the dogma of national sovereignty, by virtue of which the election of August 9, 1830, was held, will try to combat that rival principle, which would leave to the people the right to give themselves a new dynasty whenever they fail to grasp the purpose of their king: and we shall have an internal struggle which certainly will arrest the progress of France for a long time to come."

"All these reefs have been wisely avoided by England," observed Gérard; "I have been there, and I admire that beehive which sends forth its swarms over the universe and civilizes it; where discussion is a political comedy intended to satisfy

the people and to conceal the action of the government, which enjoys perfect freedom of motion in its high sphere; and where elections are not in the hands of the stupid middle class, as they are in France. With the parcelling out of real estate, England would have ceased to exist ere this. The great land-owners, the peers, manage the social mechanism there. Their navy seizes upon whole slices of the globe, in the teeth of all Europe, to satisfy the needs of their commerce and to provide places to put the unfortunate and the discontented. Instead of making war on men of capacity, of thrusting them out of sight, of underrating them, the English aristocracy constantly seeks them out, rewards them and assimilates them. Among the English, speedy action is the rule in everything relating to the government, in the choice of men and things, whereas with us everything is slow; and by nature they are slow and we are impatient. With them money is enterprising and busy; with us it is timid and suspicious. What Monsieur Grossetête says of the industrial losses which the peasant causes France is confirmed by a picture which I will draw for you in two words. English capital, by its continual movement, has created industrial values and shares yielding income to the amount of ten billions, whereas French capital, superior in point of abundance, has not created a tenth part of that amount."

"That is the more extraordinary," said Roubaud, "because they are naturally sluggish, and we, as a general rule, are impulsive or nervous."

"There is a great question to be studied, monsieur," said Clousier: "To discover what institutions are best fitted to hold the temperament of a people in check. Cromwell was unquestionably a great legislator. He alone made the England of to-day by devising the *Navigation Act*, which made the English the enemies of all other nations, which inoculated them with a fierce national pride, their mainstay. But, notwithstanding their fortress of Malta, if France and Russia should comprehend some day the possibilities of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, the route through Asia by way of Egypt, or by way of the Euphrates, perfected by means of new discoveries, will kill England, just as the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope killed Venice."

"And God counts for nothing!" cried the curé. "Monsieur Clousier and Monsieur Roubaud are indifferent in the matter of religion. And monsieur?" he said, in a questioning tone, to Gérard.

"Protestant," Grossetête replied.

"You guessed as much!" cried Véronique, looking at the curé, as she offered her hand to Clousier to go up to her own apartments.

The unfavorable impression created by Gérard's exterior was speedily dissipated, and the three notables of Montégnac congratulated themselves on such an acquisition.

"Unfortunately," said Monsieur Bonnet, "there exists between Russia and the Catholic countries washed by the Mediterranean a cause of antagonism in the unimportant schism which separates the

Greek Church from the Latin Church, a great misfortune for the future of mankind."

"Everyone preaches for his own saint," said Madame Graslin, with a smile. "Monsieur Grossetête thinks of the billions thrown away; Monsieur Clousier, of the overturning of the law; the physician sees in legislation a question of temperaments; monsieur le curé sees in religion an obstacle to a perfect understanding between Russia and France."

"Add, madame," said Gérard, "that I see in the locking up of capital by the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry the postponement of the building of railroads in France."

"What would you have, pray?" she said.

"Oh! the admirable councillors of State, who, under the Empire, devised the laws, and the Corps Législatif, chosen by the talented men of the country as well as by the land-owners, and whose only function was to oppose bad laws and wars based upon caprice! As it is constituted to-day, the Chamber of Deputies, as you will see, will come to be the governing power, and the result will be anarchy under the forms of law."

"O my God!" cried the curé, in a burst of devout patriotism, "how does it happen that such enlightened minds as these"—and he pointed to Clousier, Roubaud, and Gérard—"see the evil, point out the remedy, yet do not begin by applying it to themselves? All of you who represent the classes assailed recognize the necessity of passive obedience of the masses in the State, as among soldiers in war;

you desire unity of power, and you desire that it should never be brought in question. What England has obtained by the development of pride and human selfishness, which are a sort of faith, can be obtained here in France only by the sentiments inspired by Catholicism, and you are not Catholics! I, priest as I am, lay aside my proper character, I argue with arguers. How can you expect that the masses will become religious and obey, if they see irreligion and insubordination above them? A people united by a faith of any sort will always win an easy victory over men of no faith. The law of the general welfare, which engenders patriotism, is instantly destroyed by the law of private interests, which it justifies, and which engenders egotism. Nothing is solid and enduring, save that which is natural, and the natural thing in politics is the family. The family should be the starting-point of all institutions. A universal effect proves the existence of a universal cause; and the defects that you have pointed to on all sides come from the social principle itself, which is without strength because it has taken free-will for its basis, and free-will is the father of individualism. To make happiness depend upon the safety, the intelligence, the capacity of all is not so wise as to make it depend upon the safety and intelligence of our institutions and the capacity of a single man. It is an easier matter to find wisdom in one man than in a whole nation. Nations have hearts but no eyes, they feel and do not see. Governments ought to see, and never be swayed by

sentiment. There is, therefore, an evident contradiction between the first impulses of the masses and the action of the ruling power, which should establish its strength and its unity. To fall in with a great prince is a result of chance, to use your language; but to trust to any assembly whatsoever, even though it be composed of honorable men, is madness. France is mad at this moment! Alas! you are convinced of it as well as I. If all men of good faith, like yourselves, should set the example to those about them, if all intelligent hands should help to exalt the altars of the great republic of souls, of the only Church that has led mankind in the right path, we might see again in France the miracles that our ancestors performed here."

"What would you have, monsieur le curé?" said Gérard; "if I must speak to you as if I were in the confessional, I look upon faith as a lie that a man tells himself, hope as a lie that he tells himself concerning the future, and your charity as the stratagem of a child who behaves himself in order to get some cake."

"And yet one sleeps very peacefully, monsieur," said Madame Graslin, "when hope smoothes the pillow."

Those words silenced Roubaud, who was about to speak, and they were approved by a glance from Grossetête and the curé.

"Is it our fault," said Clousier, "if Jesus Christ had not time to found a government in accordance with his moral system, as Moses did and Confucius,

the two greatest human legislators? for the Jews and the Chinese exist to-day as nations, the former, notwithstanding their dispersion over the face of the earth; the latter, notwithstanding their isolation."

"Ah! you give me plenty of work to do," cried the curé, ingenuously; "but I will triumph, I will convert you all! You are nearer to having faith than you imagine. Truth crouches behind falsehood; go forward a step and turn about!"

At that cry from the curé, the conversation took a different turn.

The next day, before taking his leave, Monsieur Grossetête promised Véronique to become a partner in her projects as soon as their realization should be decided to be possible. Madame Graslin and Gérard rode beside his carriage and did not leave him until they reached the junction of the Montégnac road and the road from Bordeaux to Lyon. The engineer was so impatient to go over the ground and Véronique so desirous to show it to him, that they had planned the excursion the day before. Having bade the excellent old man farewell, they rode across the vast moor and skirted the base of the chain of hills, from the slope leading up to the château to the peak of the *Roche-Vive*. The engineer at once detected the continuous bank described by Farrabesche, which formed, as it were, the last layer of the foundation of the hills. Thus, by directing the streams so that they would not overflow the indestructible canal that nature had itself made, and clearing it of the earth that had

choked it up, the work of irrigation would be facilitated by that long conduit, raised about ten feet above the level of the plain. The first calculation, and the only decisive one to be made, was of the quantity of water that flowed through the Gabou; and it was advisable also to make sure whether the sides of the valley would allow the water to escape.

Véronique gave Farrabesche a horse and bade him accompany the engineer and point out to him everything he had noticed, to the most trifling detail. After a few days' study, Gérard found that the bases of the two parallel chains, although of different composition, were sufficiently solid to hold back the water. During the month of January, which was rainy, he estimated the quantity of water carried down by the Gabou. That quantity, increased by the supply from three springs which could be turned into the stream, was sufficient to irrigate an area three times greater than that of the plain of Montégnac. The damming of the Gabou, the construction of the works required to direct the water through the three valleys to the plain, would not cost more than sixty thousand francs, for the engineer discovered in the common lands a calcareous deposit which would furnish lime at a small expense, and the forest was close at hand: stone and wood cost nothing and required no outlay for carting. Pending the arrival of the season when the Gabou would be dry, the only time when these works could be undertaken, the

necessary materials could be laid in and preparations made, so that the main work could go forward rapidly. But the preparation of the plain to receive the water would cost, in Gérard's opinion, at least two hundred thousand francs, not including sowing or planting. The plain would have to be divided into rectangular plots of two hundred and fifty acres each, where the ground was not to be cleared, but only the largest stones removed. Ditchers would have to be employed to dig a great number of ditches and stone them, so that the water would not run off and could be made to flow or rise at will. That work required the active and faithful arms of conscientious laborers. Chance afforded a location without obstacles, a level plain; the water, which had a fall of ten feet, could be distributed at pleasure; there was nothing to stand in the way of obtaining the most satisfactory results, from an agricultural standpoint, producing magnificent carpets of verdure, like those which are the pride and the fortune of Lombardy. Gérard sent to the province in which he had previously been stationed for an old and experienced assistant engineer, named Fresquin.

Madame Graslin wrote to Grossetête to negotiate for her a loan of two hundred and fifty thousand francs, secured by her stock in the public funds, the income of which, if allowed to accumulate for six years, would suffice, according to Gérard's calculations, to pay principal and interest. The loan was negotiated in March. Gérard's plans, formulated with the assistance of Fresquin, were by that

time entirely perfected, as well as the taking of levels, soundings, observations, and drawings. The news of that vast undertaking, being circulated through the whole district, had stimulated the poorer part of the population. The indefatigable Farrabesche, Colorat, Clousier, the Mayor of Montégnac, Roubaud, all those who were interested in the welfare of the canton or in Madame Graslin, selected workmen for her, or pointed out poor men who deserved to be employed. Gérard purchased, on his own account and Monsieur Grossetête's, a thousand acres on the other side of the Montégnac road. Fresquin, the assistant, also took five hundred acres and sent for his wife and children to come to Montégnac.

In the early part of April, 1833, Monsieur Grossetête came to inspect the land purchased by Gérard; but his visit to Montégnac was due mainly to the arrival of Catherine Curieux, whom Madame Graslin was expecting, and who had come from Paris to Limoges by diligence. He found Madame Graslin about to start for church. Monsieur Bonnet was to say mass to invoke Heaven's blessing upon the work about to begin. All the laborers, all the women and children were present.

"Here is your protégée," said the old man, presenting to Véronique a woman of about thirty years of age, ill and weak.

"You are Catherine Curieux?" said Véronique.

"Yes, madame."

Véronique looked at her for a moment. She saw

a tall, well-built, fair-haired girl, with features of extreme gentleness, nor was their expression contradicted by the lovely gray tint of her eyes. The contour of the face, the shape of the forehead, were of a noble cast, at once august and simple, which is sometimes seen in the country in very young girls, a sort of flower of beauty, which hard work in the fields, the never-ending cares of housekeeping, exposure to the sun, and lack of proper care, cause them to lose with terrifying rapidity. Her attitude denoted that ease of movement which characterizes country girls, to which habits involuntarily adopted in Paris gave additional charm. If she had remained in La Corrèze, Catherine would certainly have been already wrinkled and worn; her coloring, formerly brilliant, would have become coarse; but Paris, while lessening her color, had preserved her beauty; sickness, fatigue, grief, had endowed her with the mysterious gifts of melancholy, with that secret depth of thought which is lacking in unfortunate country-folk, accustomed to an almost animal life. Her costume, marked by the Parisian good taste, of which all women, even the least coquettish, learn the secret so quickly, distinguished her even more from the ordinary peasant. Ignorant as she was of what her fate was to be, and having no means of judging Madame Graslin's character, she seemed decidedly shamefaced.

"Do you still love Farrabesche?" Madame Graslin asked her, when Grossetête had left them alone for a time.

"Yes, madame," she replied, with a blush.

"Why, if you cared enough for him to send him a thousand francs while he was undergoing his punishment, did you not go to meet him when he was released? Have you any feeling of repugnance for him? Speak to me as to your mother. Were you afraid that he had become altogether bad, that he no longer cared for you?"

"No, madame; but I couldn't read or write; I was working for a very exacting old lady, and she fell sick so that she had to be nursed, and I had to nurse her. Although I had figured that the day for Jacques to be discharged was approaching, I wasn't able to leave Paris until after the death of that lady, who left me nothing in spite of my devotion to her interests and her person. Before coming back, I was anxious to be cured of a trouble caused by loss of sleep and the hard work I had done. After I had used up all my savings, I had to make up my mind to go to the Saint-Louis hospital, and I have just been discharged, cured."

"Very good, my child," said Madame Graslin, touched by that simple explanation. "But tell me, now, why you deserted your parents without warning, why you left your child, why you have never sent any word to them or asked someone to write."

For all reply, Catherine wept.

"Madame," she said, at last, reassured by the pressure of Véronique's hand, "I do not know whether I was wrong, but it was beyond my strength to remain in the province. I did not

doubt myself, but other people; I was afraid of the gossip and idle talk. So long as Jacques was in danger here, I was necessary to him; but when he had gone, I felt as if I were helpless. To be an unmarried girl, with a child and no husband! the vilest creature would have been better than I. I do not know what would have become of me, if I had heard the slightest word against Benjamin or his father. I should have killed myself, I should have gone mad. My father or mother might have reproached me in a moment of anger. I am too quick-tempered to endure a reproach or an insult, mild as I am! I have been well punished, for I have never been able to see my child, although I have not passed a single day without thinking of him! I wanted to be forgotten, and I was. No one has thought of me. They have believed that I was dead, and yet I have often longed to leave everything and come here to pass a day, to see my child—"

"See, Catherine, there is your child!"

Catherine spied Benjamin, and shivered as if she had the ague.

"Benjamin," said Madame Graslin, "come and kiss your mother."

"My mother?" cried Benjamin, in surprise.

He leaped upon Catherine's neck, and she pressed him to her heart with fierce strength. But the child made his escape and ran away, crying:

"I am going to look for *him!*"

Madame Graslin, as she was assisting Catherine, who was almost swooning, to a seat, spied Monsieur

Bonnet, and could not restrain a blush when she received from her confessor a piercing glance that read her inmost thoughts.

"I hope, monsieur le curé," she said, trembling, "that you will marry Catherine and Farrabesche promptly?—Do you not recognize Monsieur Bonnet, my child? He will tell you that Farrabesche, since his return, has borne himself like an honest man; he has the esteem of the whole neighborhood; and if there is a place in the world where you can live happily and well-considered, Montégnac is the place. God willing, you will make your fortune here, for you will be my farmers. Farrabesche has become a citizen once more."

"All this is true, my child," said the curé.

At that moment, Farrabesche arrived, led by his son; he stood pale and speechless in the presence of Catherine and Madame Graslin. He realized how active the kindly interest of the one had been, and all that the other must have suffered in not coming before. Véronique led away the curé, who, for his part, was desirous to lead her away. As soon as they were out of hearing, Monsieur Bonnet gazed fixedly at his penitent and saw that she was blushing; she lowered her eyes like a guilty creature.

"You degrade well-doing," he said, severely.

"How?" she asked, raising her head.

"To do good," replied Monsieur Bonnet, "is a passion as superior to love, as mankind, madame, is superior to the individual. Now, all this is not to be accomplished by mere force and with the artlessness

of virtue. You fall from the grandeur of humanity to the worship of a single creature! Your benevolence to Farrabesche and Catherine is inspired by memories and hidden motives which take away all its merits in God's eyes. Tear from your heart the remains of the dart that the spirit of evil planted there. Do not thus deprive your good actions of their value. Will you ever attain that blessed ignorance of the good you are doing, which is the crowning grace of human actions?"

Madame Graslin had turned away to wipe her eyes, but her tears told the curé that his words touched a bleeding spot in her heart, where his finger reopened a partly-closed wound. Farrabesche, Catherine, and Benjamin came to thank their benefactress; but she motioned to them to go away and leave her with Monsieur Bonnet.

"You see how I grieve them!" she said, pointing to their disappointed faces.

And the curé, who had a soft heart, motioned to them to return.

"Be perfectly happy," she said to them.—"Here is the order restoring all your rights as a citizen, and relieving you from the formalities that humiliated you," she added, handing Farrabesche a paper that she held in her hand.

Farrabesche kissed Véronique's hand respectfully, and glanced at her with an expression at once affectionate and submissive, calm and devoted, with that devotion which nothing can change, like a dog's for his master.

"If Jacques has suffered, madame," said Catherine, in whose beautiful eyes there was a smile, "I hope to be able to give him as much happiness as he has had misery; for, whatever he may have done, he isn't wicked."

Madame Graslin turned away her head, she seemed crushed by the sight of that family, now so happy; and Monsieur Bonnet left her to go to the church, whither she dragged herself along on Monsieur Grossetête's arm.

After breakfast, they all went to witness the opening of the works, which all the old people of Montégnac also came out to see. From the slope up which the avenue to the château ran, Monsieur Grossetête and Monsieur Bonnet, with Véronique between them, could see the location of the first four roads to be opened, in the building of which the stones taken from the plain were to be used. Five men were carrying the good soil to the edge of the fields, clearing a space eighteen feet wide, the width fixed for each road. On each side, four men were engaged in digging a ditch, with the earth from which they raised an embankment along the fields. Behind them came two men, digging holes in the artificial banking, as it progressed, and planting trees in them. In each field, thirty able-bodied paupers, twenty women, and forty girls or children, in all, ninety persons, were picking up stones, which the workmen measured along the banking, in order to determine the quantity picked up by each group. Thus all branches of the work kept pace with one another,

and progressed rapidly, the workmen being picked men and full of zeal. Grossetête promised Madame Graslin to send her some trees and to ask his friends for some for her. It was evident that the château nurseries would not furnish enough to be set out in such numbers.

Toward the close of the day, which was to end with a great dinner-party at the château, Farrabesche begged Madame Graslin to grant him a moment's audience.

"Madame," he said, making his appearance with Catherine, "you have been kind enough to promise me the château farm. Your purpose in granting me such a favor is to give me an opportunity to save a little money; but Catherine has certain ideas concerning our future which I wish to lay before you. If I make my fortune, some people will be jealous: a word is quickly said, I may have disagreeable things to bear, at all events I should dread them, and Catherine, too, would always be uneasy; in fact, we do not like the idea of living near the world. So I have come to ask you to give us the land to farm that lies about the spot where the Gabou empties on the common lands, with a small part of the woods on the further side of the *Roche-Vive*. You will have a great many men at work there in July or thereabout; so it will be a simple matter to build a farm-house in a favorable position, on the high land. We shall be happy there. I will send for Guépin. The poor fellow will work like a horse. Perhaps I can find a wife for him. My boy is not lazy; no one will come

to look into the whites of our eyes, we will colonize that little corner, and I will make it my ambition to give you a fine farm there. I have a man to suggest to you for farmer at your principal farm,—a cousin of Catherine's, who has some money and will be better fitted than I am to carry on such an extensive concern as that farm. If God wills that your enterprise be successful, you will have in five years five to six thousand cattle or horses on the moor they're clearing up, and it will certainly take a strong head to manage affairs."

Madame Graslin granted Farrabesche's request, realizing the good sense that dictated it.

After the opening of the work on the plain, Madame Graslin's life was as regular as life in the country commonly is. In the morning, she went to hear mass, attended to her son, whom she idolized, and went to overlook her workmen. After dinner, she received her friends from Montégnac in her small salon, on the first floor of the clock pavilion. She taught Roubaud, Clousier, and the curé to play whist, which Gérard knew. After the game, about nine o'clock, everyone went home. The only events in that peaceful life were the successful termination of each part of the great enterprise. In the month of June, the Gabou being dry, Monsieur Gérard took up his quarters in the keeper's house. Farrabesche's farm-house, by the Gabou, had already been built. Fifty masons, brought from Paris, connected the two mountains by a wall twenty feet in thickness upon a foundation of solid concrete

twelve feet deep. The wall, which was about sixty feet high, gradually sloped from the base to the crown, where it was only ten feet wide. On the side toward the valley, Gérard backed it with a bank of concrete twelve feet thick at its base. On the side toward the common lands, a similar bank, covered with several feet of vegetable mould, supported that formidable structure, which the water could not disturb. To provide against excessive rains, the engineer arranged a waste weir at a suitable height. The masonry was carried down to the tufa or granite in each mountain, so that the water should find no issue around the ends. This dam was finished toward the middle of August. At the same time, Gérard built three canals in the three main valleys, and not one of the works reached the figure of his estimates. Thus there was money enough to finish the château farm-buildings. The work of irrigation in the plain, carried on by Fresquin, corresponded with the canal marked out by nature at the base of the mountain chain on the side of the plain, from which the irrigating trenches started. Gates were fitted to the ditches,—which the plentiful supply of loose rocks had made it possible to line with stone, —in order to keep the water in the plain at the proper level.

Every Sunday, after mass, Véronique, the engineer, the curé, the doctor, and the mayor went down by way of the park to watch the movement of the waters. The winter of 1833 and 1834 was very rainy. The water from the three streams

which had been turned into the Gabou, and the rain-water, converted the valley of the Gabou into three ponds, which were prudently dammed up at different levels, in order to provide a reserve for prolonged droughts. At the points where the valley widened out, Gérard took advantage of three small hills which rose above the water, to make islands, which were planted with trees of different kinds. This extensive operation completely changed the landscape, but five or six years must pass before it would take on its permanent physiognomy.

"The country was all naked," said Farrabesche, "and madame has clothed it."

After those great changes, Véronique was called *Madame* throughout the whole region. When the rains ceased, in June, 1834, they tried the effect of irrigation in the part of the fields where grain had been sown, and the young verdure thus nourished produced a superior quality of the *marcitis* of Italy and the Swiss fields. The system of watering, modelled upon that in use on the farms of Lombardy, moistened the whole tract equally, the surface being as smooth as a carpet. The nitre in the snow, being dissolved in the water, doubtless contributed materially to the quality of the grass. The engineer hoped to find in the crops some similarity to those of Switzerland, where that substance is, as is well known, an inexhaustible source of fruitfulness. The plantations along the sides of the roads, being kept sufficiently moist by the water left in the ditches, made rapid progress.

Thus, in 1838, five years from the inception of Madame Graslin's enterprise at Montégnac, the wild, uncultivated moor, looked upon as unfruitful by twenty generations, was green, planted in every part, and productive. Gérard had laid out five farms of one thousand acres each, in addition to the great establishment connected with the château. Gérard's farm, Grossetête's, and Fresquin's, which received the overflow of the water on Madame Graslin's domain, were arranged on the same plan and managed by the same methods. Gérard built a lovely pavilion on his property. When everything was finished, the inhabitants of Montégnac, at the suggestion of the mayor himself, who was overjoyed to resign, elected Gérard mayor of the commune.

In 1840, the departure of the first herd of cattle from Montégnac to the market at Paris was made the occasion of a rustic fête. The farms on the plain raised cattle and horses, for they had found, on clearing the land, an average of seven inches of vegetable mould, which was constantly enriched by the annual felling of trees, by the manure left by the beasts pastured there, and, above all, by the snow-water in the basin of the Gabou. In that year, Madame Graslin deemed it advisable to have a tutor for her son, who was eleven years old; she was unwilling to part with him, but wished none the less to give him a thorough education. Monsieur Bonnet wrote to the seminary. Madame Graslin, on her side, mentioned her desire and her embarrassment to Monseigneur Dutheil, recently appointed

archbishop. The selection of a man who would be likely to live at least nine years at the château was a great and momentous matter. Gérard had already offered to teach his friend Francis mathematics; but it was impossible for him to take a tutor's place, and Madame Graslin was the more dismayed concerning the selection she must make, because she felt that her health was giving way. The more her dear Montégnac increased in value, the more she increased the secret austerity of her life. Monseigneur Dutheil, with whom she still corresponded, found for her the man she desired. He sent from his diocese a young professor, twenty-five years of age, named Ruffin, whose vocation was private instruction; his knowledge was extensive; he had an exceedingly sensitive heart, which was not inconsistent with the severity essential for him who seeks to guide a child; in his case, piety in no way interfered with knowledge; last of all, he was patient and had an attractive exterior.

"I am making you a gift of real value, my dear daughter," wrote the archbishop, "this young man is worthy to be entrusted with the education of a prince. I rely upon you to assure his future, for he will be your son's spiritual father."

Monsieur Ruffin impressed Madame Graslin's faithful friends so favorably, that his arrival made no disturbance in the various friendships that were grouped about that idol, whose hours, even her moments, were sought by everyone with something like jealousy.

The year 1843 saw the prosperity of Montégnac increase beyond all hopes. The farm of the Gabou rivalled those of the plain, and the château farm led the way in all the improvements. The other five, the rent of which was to increase year by year until it reached thirty thousand francs for each in the twelfth year of the lease, yielded in 1843 a revenue of sixty thousand francs. The farmers, who were beginning to reap the fruit of their own and Madame Graslin's sacrifices, were able to improve the fields on the plain, where they raised grass of the first quality which never feared a drought. The farm of the Gabou joyfully paid an initial rent of four thousand francs.

During that year a man from Montégnac established a diligence from the chief town of the arrondissement to Limoges, starting from both places every day. Monsieur Clousier's nephew sold his clerkship and procured the creation of a notarial office in his favor. The government appointed Fresquin tax-collector of the canton. The new notary built himself a pretty house in upper Montégnac, planted mulberry-trees on the land appurtenant to it, and became Gérard's deputy-mayor. The engineer himself, emboldened by such complete success, conceived a project calculated to make Madame Graslin the possessor of a colossal fortune;—she regained possession, in that year, of the securities pledged for her loan. He proposed to turn the little river into a canal and divert the surplus water of the Gabou into it. That canal,

which would eventually reach the Vienne, would throw into the market the whole twenty thousand acres of the vast forest of Montégnac, which was admirably kept up by Colorat, but produced no income, for lack of means of transportation. They could cut a thousand acres a year, making it last twenty years, and ship valuable building timber to Limoges. That was the original idea of Graslin, who had paid but little heed to the curé's plans relative to the plain, but had given much more thought to making a canal of the little river.

V

VÉRONIQUE AT THE TOMB

Early in the following year, notwithstanding Madame Graslin's courageous bearing, her friends detected in her the premonitory symptoms of impending death. To all Roubaud's observations, to the most adroit questions of the most keen-sighted, Véronique made the same reply: "she was wonderfully well." But, in the spring, when she went to inspect her forests, her farms, her lovely fields, she manifested a childish joy which betokened melancholy previsions.

When he found himself compelled to build a low wall of concrete from the Gabou dam to the park of Montégnac, along the whole length and at the base of the hill called La Corrèze, Gérard had had the idea of enclosing the forest and uniting it to the park. Madame Graslin set aside thirty thousand francs a year for that work, which required at least seven years, but which withdrew that magnificent forest from the operation of the rights exercised by the government over the unenclosed woods of private individuals. The three ponds in the valley of the

Gabou would then be in the park. Each of those ponds, vaingloriously called lakes, had its island. With the connivance of Grossetête, Gérard had prepared a surprise for Madame Graslin's birthday in that year. He had built on the largest of those islands, the second, a small summer-house, with a rustic exterior and perfectly charming within. The ex-banker had taken part in the conspiracy, in which Farrabesche, Clousier's nephew, Fresquin, and the majority of the wealthy people of Montégnac also had a hand. Grossetête sent a lovely suite of furniture for the house. The bell-tower, copied from that at Vevay, produced a charming effect in the landscape. Six boats, two for each pond, had been secretly built, painted, and rigged during the winter by Farrabesche and Guépin, assisted by the carpenter of Montégnac.

In the middle of May, therefore, after the breakfast which Madame Graslin gave her friends, she was escorted by them through the park, beautifully laid out by Gérard, who for five years had given his attention to it as architect and as naturalist, toward the charming field in the valley of the Gabou, where the two boats lay, near the shore of the first pond. That field, watered by several limpid streams, had been taken from the base of the beautiful amphitheatre at which the valley of the Gabou begins. The woods, thinned out with true art and in such way as to produce the most beautiful masses or vistas pleasing to the eye, surrounded the field, imparting to it an air of solitude soothing to the

soul. Gérard had built upon an eminence a duplicate of the cottage of the Valley of Sion, which stands by the side of the road to Brieg, and which all travellers admire. It was to be used to house the cows and as the dairy of the château. From the balcony, one could see the whole landscape created by the engineer, which the lakes made worthy of comparison with the loveliest spots in Switzerland. It was a superb day. Not a cloud in the blue sky; on the earth a thousand charming contrasts of the sort peculiar to the beautiful month of May. The trees planted within ten years on the borders of the ponds: weeping willows, elders, ash-trees, Holland whitewood, poplars from Italy and Virginia, whitethorn and roses, acacias, birches, choice varieties all, and all arranged as the location and their shapes required, retained amid their foliage a few clouds born upon the waters and resembling faint columns of smoke. The surface of the water, clear as a mirror and placid as the sky, reflected the tall green masses of the forest, whose tree-tops, sharply outlined in the clear atmosphere, contrasted with the thickets below, wrapped in their graceful veils. The lakes, separated by strong causeways, displayed three mirrors with varying reflections, and their waters flowed from one into another in melodious cascades. The causeways formed roads for going from side to side without making the circuit of the valley. From the cottage one could see through a vista the unfertile expanse of the chalky common lands, which, seen from the lower balcony, resembled the full sea, and

contrasted strikingly with the fresh aspect of the lake and its banks.

When Véronique noticed the joy on the faces of her friends as they gave her their hands to assist her into the larger of the boats, she had tears in her eyes and let them fall in silence until they approached the first causeway. As she walked to the top of it to embark on the second fleet, she spied the summer-house, and Grossetête sitting on a bench with all his family.

"Do they wish to make me regret life?" she said to the curé.

"We wish to keep you from dying," Clousier replied.

"Life cannot be restored to the dead," she rejoined.

Monsieur Bonnet cast a stern glance at his penitent, whereat she withdrew within herself.

"Pray allow me to take charge of your health," said Roubaud, in a gentle, imploring voice, "I am certain of my ability to preserve to this canton its living glory, and to all our friends the tie that binds their lives together."

Véronique hung her head and Gérard guided the boat slowly toward the island in the centre of that lake, which was the largest of the three, and there they could hear the roar of the first, then flowing over the dam and giving a voice to that charming landscape.

"You are quite right to arrange for me to bid adieu to this fascinating scene!" she said, as she looked at

the trees, which were so thickly covered with leaves that they concealed the two banks.

The only sign of disapprobation in which her friends allowed themselves to indulge was a depressing silence, and Véronique, at another glance from Monsieur Bonnet, leaped lightly ashore, assuming a cheerful manner, which she did not again lay aside. Once more the châtelaine, she was charming, and the Grossetête family recognized in her the lovely Madame Graslin of the old days.

"Assuredly, you can still live!" said her mother, in her ear.

On that beautiful fête-day, amid that sublime scene, created with no other means than those provided by nature, nothing seemed calculated to wound Véronique, and yet she received her *coup de grâce* on that occasion. They were to return about nine o'clock by way of the fields, where the roads, as fine as English or Italian roads, were the engineer's pride. The abundance of loose stone, laid aside in piles at the time the moor was cleared, made it so simple a matter to keep them in repair, that for five years they had been practically macadamized. The carriages were waiting at the outlet of the last valley toward the plain, almost at the foot of the *Roche-Vive*. The horses, all bred at Montégnac, were the first of the stock old enough to be sold; the superintendent of the stud had had ten of them raised for the château stables, and their trial was a part of the programme of the celebration. Madame Graslin's calèche, a present from Grossetête, was drawn by

the four finest horses, simply harnessed, pawing and tossing their heads.

After dinner, the happy party went to drink their coffee in a small wooden kiosk, copied from one of those on the Bosporus and situated on the point of the island where the view embraced the last pond. Colorat's house,—for the keeper, unequal to duties as difficult as those of head-keeper of Montégnac, had succeeded to the post formerly held by Farrabesche,—and the old house restored, formed one of the elements of that landscape, bounded by the great Gabou dam, which arrested the glance at a lovely mass of rich and sturdy vegetation.

From there, Madame Graslin thought that she could see her son Francis in the vicinity of the nursery originally started by Farrabesche; she looked for him, but did not see him until Monsieur Ruffin pointed him out to her playing on the shores of the pond with Grossetête's granddaughters' children. Véronique dreaded some accident. Heeding no remonstrances, she left the kiosk, leaped into one of the boats, was set ashore on the causeway, and ran in search of her son. That little incident led to a general departure from the island. The venerable great-grandfather, Grossetête, was the first to propose a walk along the lovely path that skirted the last two lakes, following the caprices of that mountainous soil. Madame Graslin, from a distance, saw Francis in the arms of a woman dressed in mourning. Judging from the shape of the hat and the cut of the clothes, the woman was a foreigner.

Véronique, in dismay, called her son, who came to her.

"Who is that woman?" she asked the other children, "and why did Francis leave you?"

"That lady called him by his name," said a little girl.

At that moment, La Sauviat and Gérard, who had hurried on in advance of the others, came up.

"Who is that woman, my dear child?" Madame Graslin asked Francis.

"I don't know," he replied, "but nobody but you and grandma kiss me like that. She was crying," he said in his mother's ear.

"Would you like me to run after her?" asked Gérard.

"No!" said Madame Graslin, with an abruptness which was unfamiliar in her manner.

With a delicacy which Véronique appreciated, Gérard led the other children away and went to meet the rest of the party, leaving La Sauviat, Véronique, and Francis alone.

"What did she say to you?" La Sauviat asked her grandson.

"I don't know, she didn't speak French."

"Didn't you understand anything?" said Véronique.

"Oh! yes, she said several times, and that's how I remembered it: '*Dear brother!*' "

Véronique grasped her mother's arm and kept her son's hand in hers; but she had taken only a few steps, when her strength abandoned her.

"What's the matter? what has happened?" they asked La Sauviat.

"Oh! my daughter is in danger!" said the old Auvergnat, in a deep, guttural voice.

It was necessary to carry Véronique to her carriage; she wanted Aline and Francis to get in with her and asked Gérard to join them.

"You have been in England, I believe?" she said to him when she had recovered her wits, "and you know English? What do the words '*dear brother*' mean?"

"Does not everybody know?" cried Gérard. "That means: '*cher frère.*'"

Véronique exchanged a glance with Aline and La Sauviat that made them shudder, but they restrained their emotion. The joyous shouts of all those who witnessed the departure of the carriages, the splendor of the sunset over the level fields, the perfect gait of the horses, the laughter of her friends who followed, the brisk gallop of those who accompanied her on horseback—nothing could arouse Madame Graslin from her torpor. Her mother bade the coachman drive faster, and their carriage was the first to reach the château. When the company had assembled there, they learned that Véronique had locked herself in her room, and would see no one.

"I fear," said Gérard to his friends, "that Madame Graslin has received some mortal blow."

"Where?—How?" they asked him.

"In the heart," was his reply.

Two days later, Roubaud set out for Paris. He had found Madame Graslin so seriously ill, that, in order to snatch her from the jaws of death, he went to obtain the opinion and the assistance of the best physician in Paris. But Véronique had received Roubaud only to put an end to the importunities of her mother and Aline, who implored her to take care of herself: she felt that she was stricken unto death. She refused to see Monsieur Bonnet, sending word to him that it was not yet time. Although all her friends, who had come from Limoges for her birthday, wished to remain with her, she begged them to excuse her for her failure to fulfil the duties of hostess, but she wished to remain in the most profound solitude.

After Roubaud's abrupt departure, the guests at the château of Montégnac returned to Limoges, less disappointed than despairing, for all of those whom Grossetête had brought with him adored Véronique. They lost themselves in conjectures as to what could have caused that mysterious disaster.

One evening, two days after the departure of the numerous Grossetête family, Aline introduced Catherine into Madame Graslin's apartment. La Farrabesche stood nailed to the spot at sight of the change that had so suddenly taken place in her mistress, whose face seemed to her almost distorted.

"*Mon Dieu*, madame!" she cried, "what a deal of harm that poor girl did! If we could have foreseen it, Farrabesche and I would never have received her. She has just learned that madame is

sick and has sent me to tell Madame Sauviat that she wishes to speak to her."

"Still here!" cried Véronique. "Where is she now?"

"My husband took her to the cottage."

"Very well," said Madame Graslin; "leave us and tell Farrabesche to go. Tell this woman that my mother will go to see her, and let her wait."

When it was dark, Véronique, leaning on her mother's arm, walked slowly through the park toward the cottage. The moon was shining in all its splendor, the air was mild, and the two women, visibly moved, received encouragement, as it were, from nature. La Sauviat stopped at short intervals to allow her daughter to rest; her suffering was so intense that it was midnight before they reached the path that ran down from the woods to the sloping field, where the silvery roof of the cottage glistened. The moonlight gave to the tranquil surface of the lake the color of pearl. The faint noises of the night, that echo so loudly in the silence, formed a soothing harmony. Véronique sat on the bench outside the cottage, amid the lovely spectacle of that starlit night. The murmuring of two voices and the sound of the footsteps of two persons on the sand, still at some distance, were brought to her ears by the water, which, in the silence, transmits sounds as faithfully as it reflects objects in calm weather. Véronique recognized the curé's voice by its exquisite sweetness, also the rustling of the cassock and of some silk stuff, presumably a woman's dress.

"Let us go in," she said to her mother.

La Sauviat and Véronique sat down on a manger in the lower room, intended for a cow-barn.

"My child," the curé was saying, "I do not reproach you, you are excusable; but you may be the cause of an irreparable misfortune, for she is the soul of this whole region."

"Oh! monsieur, I will go away this very evening," replied the stranger; "but, I can say it to you, to leave my dear province again will be my death. If I had remained another day in that horrible New York, or in the United States, where there is neither hope nor faith nor charity, I should have died without being sick. The air I breathed gave me a pain in my chest, the food ceased to nourish me, I was dying, although I seemed full of life and health. My suffering ceased as soon as I set foot on the vessel. I thought I was in France. Oh! monsieur, I saw my mother and one of my sisters-in-law die of grief. My grandfather and grandmother Tascheron are dead, dead, dear Monsieur Bonnet, for all the unexampled prosperity of Tascheronville. Yes, my father founded a village in the State of Ohio; that village has become almost a city, and a third part of the land included in it is tilled by our family, for God has been good to us always: our farming has been successful, our crops are magnificent, and we are rich! We have been able to build a Catholic church; the town is Catholic, we do not allow any other form of worship there, and we hope to convert by our example the thousand and one sects that

surround us. The true religion is in the minority in that land of money and selfishness, where souls are cold. However, I would rather return there to die than to do the least injury to our dear Francis's mother, or cause her the slightest pain. Only, Monsieur Bonnet, pray take me to the rectory to-night, and let me pray by *his* grave, which is the only thing that attracted me here; for, as I approached the spot where *he* is, I felt like another person. No, I did not think I could be so happy here!"

"Very well," said the curé, "let us go. If the day ever comes when you can return without inconvenience, I will write you, Denise; but perhaps this brief visit to your province will enable you to live in peace over yonder."

"Oh! must I leave this country, which is so beautiful now? Why, see what Madame Graslin has done with the Gabou!" she said, pointing to the lake lying in the moonlight. "Some time all this property will belong to our dear Francis—"

"You shall not go, Denise," said Madame Graslin, appearing at the door of the cottage.

Jean-François Tascheron's sister clasped her hands at the sight of the spectre who addressed her. At that moment, the pallid Véronique, standing in the moonlight, looked like a ghost outlined against the dark background of the interior as seen through the open door. Her eyes gleamed like stars.

"No, my child, you shall not leave the country you have come so far to see, and you shall be happy

here, unless God should refuse to second my work, and it is He, doubtless, who sends you!"

She took the astonished Denise by the hand, and led her by a path to the other bank of the lake, leaving her mother and the curé, who sat down on the bench.

"We must let her do as she wishes," said La Sauviat.

A few moments later Véronique returned alone, and was taken back to the château by her mother and the curé. Doubtless she had formed some plan which demanded mystery, for no one in the neighborhood saw Denise or heard her name. Madame Graslin took to her bed once more and did not leave it; she grew worse day by day, and seemed vexed at not being able to rise, making several attempts to walk in the park, but always in vain. But a few days subsequent to this scene, early in June, she made a superhuman effort one morning, left her bed, and insisted upon dressing and arraying herself as for a festal occasion; she begged Gérard to give her his arm: for her friends came every day to inquire for her; and, when Aline said that her mistress intended to go to walk, they all hurried to the château. Madame Graslin, who had summoned all her strength, exhausted her last resources to take that walk. She accomplished her purpose in a convulsive effort of the will, which was to be followed by a terrible reaction.

"Let us go to the cottage, and alone," she said to Gérard, in a soft voice, glancing at him with

a sort of coquetry. "This is the last prank I shall play, for I dreamed last night that the doctors arrived."

"Do you want to see your woods?" said Gérard.

"For the last time," she replied. "But I have some strange propositions to make to you," she said, in an insinuating voice.

She forced Gérard to embark with her on the second lake, to which she went on foot. When the engineer, surprised that she should undertake such an excursion, took up the oars, she indicated the summer-house as their goal.

"My friend," she said to him, after a long pause, during which she gazed at the sky, the water, the hills, the shores of the lake, "I have the strangest request to make of you, but I believe that you are the man to obey me."

"In everything, sure that you can wish for nothing that is not good," he cried.

"I want you to marry," she replied, "and you will thereby gratify the wish of a dying woman who is certain that she is assuring your happiness."

"I am too ugly!" said the engineer.

"The person I have in mind is pretty, she is young, she wishes to live at Montégnac, and, if you marry her, you will help to make my last moments peaceful. Let there be no question of her qualities between us; I give her to you as a woman in a thousand; and, as the first sight will be enough, so far as youth and beauty and personal charm are concerned, we are going to see her at the

ON THE SHORE OF THE GABOU

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summer-house. On our return, you will say *no* or *yes* in all seriousness."

After this confidence, the engineer rowed more rapidly, whereat Madame Graslin smiled. Denise, who lived in entire seclusion in the summer-house, recognized Madame Graslin, and made haste to open the door. Véronique and Gérard entered. The poor girl could not restrain a blush as she met the glance of the engineer, who was agreeably surprised by her beauty.

"La Curieux lets you want for nothing?" Véronique asked her.

"Look, madame," she said, pointing to her breakfast.

"This is Monsieur Gérard, whom I have mentioned to you," continued Véronique; "he will be my son's guardian, and after my death you will live together at the château until he attains his majority."

"Oh! do not speak so, madame."

"Why, look at me, my child!" she said to Denise, detecting instantly the tears in her eyes.—"She comes from New York," she said to Gérard.

That was a means of breaking the ice between the two. Gérard questioned Denise, and Véronique let them talk as she sat gazing at the last lake of the Gabou. At six o'clock, Gérard and Véronique rowed back in their boat toward the cottage.

"Well?" she said, inquiringly, looking at her friend.

"You have my word."

"Although you are a man without prejudices," she continued, "you must not be left in ignorance of the painful circumstances which compelled that poor child to leave the province, to which she has been led back by homesickness."

"A misstep?"

"Oh, no!" said Véronique; "if so, should I introduce her to you? She is the sister of a mechanic who died on the scaffold."

"Ah! Tascheron," he exclaimed, "Père Pingret's murderer!"

"Yes, she is a murderer's sister!" echoed Madame Graslin, with cutting irony; "you can take back your word."

She could not go on; Gérard was obliged to carry her to the bench outside the cottage, where she lay unconscious for a few moments. She found Gérard on his knees, and he said to her when she opened her eyes:

"I will marry Denise!"

Madame Graslin raised Gérard, took his head in her hands, and kissed him on the forehead; observing his amazement at the warmth of her gratitude, Véronique pressed his hand and said:

"You will soon know the solution of this enigma. Try to take me back to the terrace, where we shall find our friends. It is very late, and I am very weak, and yet I wish to bid farewell to this dear plain from afar!"

Although the day had been insufferably hot, the storms that ravaged Europe and France during that

year, but respected the Limousin, raged in the basin of the Loire, and the air was beginning to grow cool. The sky was so cloudless that the eye grasped the slightest details on the horizon. What words can describe the delightful concert produced by the softened noises of the village, enlivened by the workmen returning from the fields! That scene, to be fittingly reproduced, demands the brush of one who is a great landscape painter and a painter of the human face at the same time. Is there not, in very truth, a curious similitude, and difficult to reproduce, between the weariness of nature and that of man? The tempered heat of the dog-days and the rarefaction of the air give to the slightest sounds produced by living things their full significance. Women sitting at their doors awaiting their husbands, who frequently bring the children with them, chatter among themselves and work on. From the roofs ascend wreaths of smoke which announce the preparation of the last meal of the day, the most cheerful among the peasants; after it, they sleep. The bustle expresses the happy thoughts of those who have finished their day. You hear singing, certainly of a very different character from that you hear in the morning. In that respect, the villagers imitate the birds, whose warbling toward evening bears no resemblance to their shrill notes at dawn. All nature sings a hymn to repose, as it sings at sunrise a hymn to activity. The most trivial actions of animate beings seem to be tinged with the soft harmonious hues which the setting sun casts athwart the

fields, and which give a placid aspect to the gravel in the roads. If anyone should dare deny the influence of that hour, the loveliest of the day, the flowers would put him to shame, intoxicating him with their most pungent odors, which they then exhale and mingle with the softest chirping of the insects and the amorous cooing of the birds.

The trenches that cross and recross the plain beyond the village were veiled with delicate, light vapors. In the great fields, divided by the departmental road, at this time shaded by poplars, acacias, and Japanese varnish-trees, symmetrically arranged and all so well grown that they already provided shade, could be seen the vast and celebrated herds of fat cattle, scattered about or in groups, some chewing the cud, others still grazing. Men, women, and children were finishing the most attractive of a farmer's occupations, hay-making. The evening air, sharpened by the sudden coolness due to the storms, brought the fragrance of the new-mown grass and the trusses of hay already made up. The slightest details of that lovely panorama could be distinctly seen: those who, fearing a storm, were finishing in hot haste the hayricks, around which the hay-makers were running with laden forks, and those who were loading the wagons among the trussers, and those who were still mowing in the distance, and the women who were turning the long lines of grass, lying like hatched lines over the fields, preparatory to raking them up, and those who were hastily raking the hay into

piles. One could hear the laughter of those who were playing, mingled with the joyous cries of the children as they pushed one another into the hay. One could distinguish the pink or red or blue skirts, the neckerchiefs, the bare legs and arms of the women, all with the broad-brimmed hats of cheap straw on their heads, and the shirts of the men, almost all of whom wore white trousers. The last rays of the sun filtered through the long lines of poplars planted along the ditches that divide the plain into fields of unequal size, and touched caressingly the groups of horses, wagons, men, women, children, and horned beasts. The drovers and shepherdesses were beginning to collect their flocks, calling them together to the notes of rustic horns. The scene was at once noisy and silent, a curious antithesis which will astonish none but those to whom the splendors of the country are unknown. On both sides of the village, wagon-trains of green fodder followed one another.

There was a something indefinably soothing in the spectacle. And so Véronique walked silently along between Gérard and the curé. When, through a gap made by a country lane running between the houses below the terrace, the rectory, and the church, they were able to look down into the high street of Montégnac, Gérard and Monsieur Bonnet saw that the eyes of men, women, and children, of all the different groups, were turned upon them, gazing more particularly, doubtless, at Madame Graslin. How great affection and gratitude were

expressed by the attitudes! What blessings were showered upon Véronique! With what reverential attention were the glances of one and all fixed upon those three benefactors of a whole canton! Thus man added a hymn of gratitude to all the other evening songs. And, although Madame Graslin's eyes, as she walked on, were fixed upon those long, magnificent carpets of verdure, her dearest creation, the priest and the mayor did not take their eyes from the groups below, for it was impossible to misinterpret their expression: grief, melancholy, regret mingled with hope, were depicted therein. Everyone at Montégnac knew that Roubaud had gone to consult eminent physicians at Paris, and that the benefactress of the canton was drawing near the end of a fatal sickness. At all the markets within a radius of ten leagues, the peasants asked those from Montégnac: "How is your bourgeoise?" Thus the solemn thought of death was hovering over those fields, in the midst of that rustic tableau. Far off in the hayfield, more than one mower as he sharpened his scythe, more than one young girl resting her arm on her fork, more than one farmer from the top of his hayrick, when they saw Madame Graslin, stood pensively gazing at that noble woman, the glory of La Corrèze, eagerly seeking something upon which to base a favorable augury, or looking simply to admire, impelled by a sentiment stronger than the inclination to work. "She is taking a walk, so she must be better!" That simple phrase was on every lip.

Madame Graslin's mother, sitting on the cast-iron bench which Véronique had had placed at the end of the terrace, at the corner from which the cemetery could be seen through the balustrade, studied her daughter's movements and watched her closely as she walked, and the tears gathered in her eyes. Accustomed as she was to the exertions of that superhuman courage, she knew that Véronique at that moment was already suffering the pangs of a horrible death-agony, and kept herself upon her feet by a heroic effort of her will. Those tears, almost red, which rolled down over that septuagenarian face, tanned and wrinkled, whose parchment-like surface seemed unlikely to soften under any emotion, aroused the tears of young Graslin, who was standing between Monsieur Ruffin's legs.

"What's the matter, my child?" said the tutor, quickly.

"My grandma is crying," he replied.

Monsieur Ruffin, whose eyes were fixed upon Madame Graslin as she came toward them, looked at Mère Sauviat and was deeply touched at the sight of that old Roman matron's face, petrified by grief and wet with tears.

"Why did you not prevent her going out, madame?" said the tutor to the old woman, whose mute grief made her august and sacred.

While Véronique came forward with majestic, wonderfully graceful carriage, La Sauviat, impelled by despair at the thought of surviving her daughter,

disclosed the secret of many things that aroused curiosity.

"To think," she exclaimed, "of walking, when one wears a hair-cloth vest that punctures the skin at every step!"

That exclamation appalled the young man, who had not failed to notice the exquisite grace of Véronique's movements, and who shuddered at the thought of the terrible, constant domination that the mind must have acquired over the body. The Parisian woman most renowned for ease of carriage, for her figure and gait, would have been outdone by Véronique at that moment.

"She has worn it thirteen years, she put it on after she finished nursing her boy," said the old woman, pointing to Francis. "She has done miracles here; but, if her life were known, she might well be canonized. Since she has been here, no one has ever seen her eat: do you know why? Three times a day Aline carries her a piece of dry bread on a large plate covered with ashes, and a few beans cooked in water, without salt, on a plate of red earthenware, like those used to give dogs their food! Yes, that is how the woman who has given life to this canton lives.—She prays, kneeling on the edge of her hair-cloth. If it weren't for those austerities, she says, she never could have the pleasant smile on her face that you have seen there. I tell you this," continued the old woman, in an undertone, "so that you can tell the doctor Monsieur Roubaud is going to bring down from

Paris. If they prevent my daughter from going on with her penances, perhaps they might yet save her, although the hand of death is already on her head. Look at her! Ah! I must be very strong to have been able to endure all these things fifteen years!"

The old woman took her grandson's hand and passed it over her forehead and her cheeks, as if that tiny hand spread a refreshing balm; then she imprinted a kiss upon it, overflowing with the affection of which the secret belongs to grandmothers as well as to mothers.

Meanwhile, Véronique had arrived within a few steps of the bench, accompanied by Clousier, the curé, and Gérard. In the mellow rays of the setting sun she shone resplendent with a ghastly beauty. Her yellow forehead, furrowed by long wrinkles piled upon one another like clouds, revealed one fixed thought amid all her inward troubles. Her face, absolutely devoid of color, white with the dead, sallow whiteness of plants that have no sun, presented a contour that was thin without being sharp, and bore traces of the terrible physical pain produced by mental suffering. She combated the mind with the body, and *vice versa*. She was such an utter wreck that she resembled her former self only as an aged woman resembles her portrait as a girl. The ardent gleam of her eyes betrayed the despotic empire exerted by a Christian will over the body, reduced to what religion wishes it to be. In that woman the mind drew the flesh in its train, as the

Achilles of profane poetry drew Hector around the walls of Troy; it dragged it triumphantly over the stony pathways of life, it had forced it to wander for fifteen years around the heavenly Jerusalem, where it hoped to be admitted, not by fraud, but amid triumphant acclamations. Never was one of the anchorites who lived in the dry and barren African deserts more completely master of his passions, than was Véronique in that superb château, in the heart of that fertile country, with its placid, voluptuous landscapes, beneath the protecting mantle of that vast forest, whence science, the inheritor of Moses' staff, had caused abundance, prosperity, and happiness for a whole canton to gush forth. She contemplated the results of twelve years of patience—a work which would have been the pride of a man of superior talents—with the gentle modesty which Pontormo's pencil gave to the face of his *Christian Purity Caressing the Divine Unicorn*. The devout châtelaine, whose silent mood was respected by her two companions when they saw that her eyes were fixed on the vast plain, once sterile, now fruitful, walked with her arms folded and her eyes fixed on the road where it met the horizon.

Suddenly she stopped, within two steps of her mother, who gazed at her as the Mother of Christ must have gazed at her Son on the cross; she raised her hand and pointed to the junction of the Montégnac road and the main highway.

"Do you see," she said, with a smile, "that

calèche, drawn by four post-horses? That is Monsieur Roubaud returning. We shall soon know how many hours I have to live."

"Hours!" said Gérard.

"Did I not tell you that I was taking my last walk?" she rejoined. "Did I not come here to look for the last time at this lovely scene in all its splendor?"

She pointed to the village, where the entire population was assembled at that moment on the square in front of the church; then to the beautiful fields, illumined by the sun's last rays.

"Ah!" she continued, "let me see God's blessing in the peculiar atmospheric condition to which we owe the preservation of our crops. All about us, tempests, rain, hail, lightning, have smitten without respite or mercy. The people think so; why should not I think as they do? I feel so strongly the need of finding in this a good omen of what awaits me when my eyes are closed!"

The child rose, took his mother's hand, and placed it upon his head. Véronique, deeply touched by that eloquent gesture, seized her son, and, with superhuman strength, lifted him, placed him on her left arm as if he were still at the breast, kissed him, and said:

"Do you see all this land, my son? When you are a man, continue your mother's work."

"There are a very few strong and highly-privileged beings who are permitted to contemplate death face to face, to fight a long duel with it, and

to display a courage and address that compel our admiration; you afford us that awe-inspiring spectacle, madame," said the curé, in a grave voice; "but perhaps you lack pity for us: allow us at least to hope that you are mistaken, and that God will permit you to finish all that you have begun."

"I have done nothing except with your assistance, my friends," she said. "I have been able to be of use to you, but I am so no longer. Everything is green about us; there is no desolation anywhere save in my heart. As you know, my dear curé, I can find peace and pardon nowhere but there."

She put out her hand toward the cemetery. She had not said as much about it since the day of her arrival, when she had swooned at that spot. The curé looked at his penitent, and he had been accustomed so long to read her mind, that he saw that in those simple words of his he had won a new triumph. Véronique must have been moved beyond measure, to break her silence, after twelve years, with a sentence which said so much. So the curé clasped his hands with a gesture that he often used, instinct with religious fervor, and glanced, in profound emotion, at the group formed by that family, all of whose secrets had passed into his heart. Gérard, to whom the words peace and pardon must have seemed most strange, was speechless with amazement. Monsieur Ruffin, his eyes fastened on Véronique, was like one stupefied.

At that moment, the calèche was rapidly approaching them, passing tree after tree.

"There are five of them!" said the curé, who stood where he could see and count the travellers.

"Five!" cried Monsieur Gérard. "Will five know any more than two?"

"Ah!" muttered Madame Graslin, who was leaning on the curé's arm, "the procureur-général is there! Why has he come here?"

"And Papa Grossetête, too!" cried Francis.

"Madame," said the curé, who was supporting Madame Graslin, leading her a few steps away, "have courage, and be worthy of yourself!"

"What does he want?" she replied, leaning over the balustrade.—"Mother!"

Old La Sauviat ran to her with an agility that belied her years.

"I shall see him again!" said Véronique.

"If he comes with Monsieur Grossetête," replied the curé, "doubtless his intentions are good."

"Ah! monsieur, my daughter is dying!" cried La Sauviat, watching the effect of those words on Madame Graslin's face. "Can her heart endure such painful emotions? Until now, Monsieur Grossetête has kept that man from seeing Véronique."

Madame Graslin's face was on fire.

"Do you hate him so bitterly?" Monsieur Bonnet asked his penitent.

"She left Limoges in order not to let all Limoges into her secrets," said La Sauviat, dismayed by the rapid change that was taking place in Madame Graslin's already distorted features.

"Don't you see that he will poison my few

remaining hours, during which I ought to think of nothing but Heaven? He nails me to the earth," cried Véronique.

The curé took her arm once more, and compelled her to walk a few steps with him; when they were alone, he bestowed upon her one of those angelic glances by which he soothed the most violent impulses of the heart.

"If that is so," he said, "as your confessor, I bid you to receive him, to be kind and affectionate to him, to lay aside this vestment of wrath, and to forgive him as God will forgive you. So there is still a remnant of passion in this heart which I thought purified. Burn this last grain of incense on the altar of repentance, else everything about you will be a falsehood."

"There was still that last effort to be made, and it is made," she replied, wiping her eyes. "The devil still occupied that last fold of my heart, and doubtless God suggested to Monsieur de Granville the thought that brings him here.—How many more times will God smite me?" she cried.

She paused, as if to offer up a silent prayer; she went back to La Sauviat, and said, in a low voice:

"My dear mother, be kind and amiable to monsieur le procureur-général."

The old Auvergnat shuddered as if with the fever.

"There is no more hope," she said, seizing the curé's hand.

At that moment, the calèche, announced by the postilion's whip, was ascending the hill; the gate

was thrown open, the carriage entered the court-yard, and the travellers at once came out on the terrace. There were the illustrious Archbishop Dutheil, who had come to consecrate Monseigneur Gabriel de Rastignac; the procureur-général, Monsieur Grossetête, and Monsieur Roubaud, on whose arm was one of the most celebrated physicians in Paris, Horace Bianchon.

"Welcome," said Véronique to her guests.—"And you, above all," she said, offering her hand to the procureur-général, and pressing his warmly.

The amazement of Monsieur Grossetête, the archbishop, and La Sauviat was so great, that it carried the day over the profound acquired discretion which distinguishes the old. They exchanged glances.

"I relied upon Monseigneur's intervention, and that of my friend, Monsieur Grossetête," replied Monsieur de Granville, "to obtain a favorable reception from you. It would have been a lifelong grief to me not to have seen you again."

"I thank him who brought you here," she replied, looking at the Comte de Granville for the first time in fifteen years. "I have borne you much ill-will for a long while; but I have recognized the injustice of my feelings toward you, and you shall know why, if you will remain at Montégnac until the day after to-morrow.—Monsieur," she said, turning to Horace Bianchon, and saluting him, "will confirm my apprehensions, I doubt not.—It was God who sent you, monseigneur," she added, bowing before the archbishop. "You will not refuse, in

memory of our old friendship, to assist me in my last moments? What a privilege to me to have about me the beings who have loved me and sustained me throughout my life!"

At the word *loved*, she turned with a gracious smile to Monsieur de Granville, who was affected to tears by that mark of affection. The most profound silence ensued. The two physicians glanced at each other as if to ask by what magical power that woman stood erect, suffering what she must suffer. The other three were so terrified by the alteration her sickness had produced in her, that they exchanged their thoughts only with their eyes.

"Permit me to go with these gentlemen," she said, with her usual charm of manner, "it is an urgent matter."

She saluted all her guests, took an arm of each physician, and walked toward the château at a slow and painful gait that foreboded an impending catastrophe.

"Monsieur Bonnet," said the archbishop to the curé, "you have performed miracles!"

"Not I, but God, monseigneur," he replied.

"They said she was dying," cried Monsieur Grossetête, "but she is dead! there is nothing left but a mind."

"A soul," said Monsieur Gérard.

"She is still the same!" cried the procureur-général.

"She is a stoic after the manner of the philosophers of the Portico," said the tutor.

They all walked in silence along the balustrade, looking at the landscape, over which the flames of the setting sun cast the most beautiful bright red beams.

"To me, who saw this country thirteen years ago," said the archbishop, pointing to the fertile plains, the valley, and the mountain of Montégnac, "this miracle is as extraordinary as the other I have just witnessed: for how is it that you allow Madame Graslin to be up? she should be in bed."

"So she was," said La Sauviat. "After ten days, during which she did not once leave her bed, she insisted on getting up to see the country for the last time."

"I can understand that she wished to bid adieu to her own creation," said Monsieur de Granville, "but she ran the risk of dying on this terrace."

Monsieur Roubaud advised us not to contradict her," said La Sauviat.

"What a prodigy!" cried the archbishop, whose eyes did not tire of wandering over the landscape. "She has made the desert bring forth fruit!—But we know, monsieur," he added, looking at Gérard, "that your knowledge and your labors have had much to do with it."

"We have been only her workmen," replied the mayor; "yes, we are only hands, she is the thought!"

La Sauviat left the group to go to learn the decision of the physician from Paris.

"It will require heroism on our part," said the

procureur-général to the archbishop and the curé, "to witness her death."

"True," said Monsieur Grossetête, "but we must be willing to do great things for such a friend."

After they had walked back and forth several times, all absorbed in the gravest thoughts, they saw two of Madame Graslin's farmers coming toward them; they said that they were sent by the whole village to express their painful anxiety to know the verdict of the doctor from Paris.

"They are in consultation, and we know nothing as yet, my friends," the archbishop replied.

At that moment, Monsieur Roubaud came running toward them, and his hurried gait made them all quicken theirs.

"Well?" said the mayor.

"She has not forty-eight hours to live!" replied Monsieur Roubaud. "In my absence the disease has reached its fullest development. Monsieur Bianchon cannot understand how she can walk. Such rare phenomena as that are always due to intense excitement.—So, messieurs," he said to the archbishop and the curé, "she belongs to you; science is of no avail, and my illustrious confrère is of the opinion that you have hardly time for your ceremonies."

"Let us go and say the forty hours' prayers," said the curé to his parishioners, preparing to withdraw. "His Grace will, doubtless, deign to administer the last sacraments?"

The archbishop bowed; he could not speak, his eyes

were filled with tears. They all sat down, resting their elbows on the balustrade, and abandoned themselves to their thoughts. The church-bells tolled sadly. Thereupon they heard the footsteps of the whole population flocking to the porch. The rays of the candles shone through the trees in Monsieur Bonnet's garden, the chants arose. Over all the country-side naught was to be seen save the reddish gleams of the twilight; all the birds had ceased their singing; only the tree-toad uttered his long, clear, melancholy note.

"Let us go and do our duty," said the archbishop, walking slowly and as if overwhelmed by grief.

The consultation was held in the large salon of the château. That enormous apartment communicated with a state bedroom furnished in red damask, where the ostentatious Graslin had displayed the proverbial magnificence of financiers. Véronique had not entered the room six times in fourteen years, the great apartments were utterly useless to her, for she never received there; but the effort she had made to fulfil her last obligation and to subdue her last revolt had taken away her strength, she could not go up to her own room. When the illustrious physician had taken the sick woman's hand and felt her pulse, he glanced at Monsieur Roubaud and made a sign; together they lifted her and carried her to the bed in that room. Aline quickly opened the doors. Like all beds kept for purposes of show, that bed had no sheets; the doctors laid Madame

Graslin on the red damask coverlid and stretched her out there. Roubaud opened the windows, pushed up the blinds, and called. The servants and old La Sauviat ran at his call. They lighted the yellow candles in the candelabra.

"It is written," cried the dying woman, smiling, "that my death shall be what death should be to every Christian soul: a fête!"

During the consultation, she said:

"Monsieur le procureur-général did his duty, I went away, he drove me to it—"

The old mother looked at her daughter and placed her finger on her lips.

"I will speak, mother," replied Véronique. "The finger of God is in all this, I tell you! I am going to die in a red chamber."

La Sauviat left the room, terrified by her words.

"Aline," she said, "she is speaking! she is speaking!"

"Ah! madame is out of her senses," cried the faithful servant, who was bringing the sheets. "Go and find monsieur le curé, madame."

"You must undress your mistress," said Bianchon to the maid, when she entered the room.

"That will be very difficult, for madame wears a hair-cloth vest."

"What! such horrible things are still done in the nineteenth century?" cried the great doctor.

"Madame Graslin has never allowed me to touch her stomach," said Monsieur Roubaud. "I have had no opportunity to find out anything concerning her

disease, except by the condition of her face, by her pulse, and by such information as I obtained from her mother and her maid."

They had placed Véronique on a couch while they were preparing the state bed that stood at the end of the room. The doctors talked together in undertones. La Sauviat and Aline made the bed. The faces of the two Auvergnats were ghastly to look upon; their hearts were torn by the thought: "We are making her bed for the last time, she will die here!"

The consultation was not long. First of all, Bianchon peremptorily ordered Aline and La Sauviat to cut off the hair-cloth vest and put on a chemise, despite the patient's remonstrances. During that operation the two doctors went into the salon. When Aline passed through, carrying that terrible instrument of penance in a napkin, she said to them:

"Madame's body is nothing but one great sore!"

The doctors returned to the bedroom.

"Your will is stronger than Napoléon's, madame," said Bianchon, after various questions, which Véronique answered clearly: "you retain your mind and your faculties in the last stage of the disease in which the Emperor lost his marvellous intelligence. From what I know of you, I think it best to tell you the truth."

"On my knees I beg you to do so," she said; "you have the power to mete out to me what little strength I still have, and I need all my life for a few hours."

"Think now of your salvation, nothing else," said Bianchon.

"If God does me the favor to allow me to die utterly," she replied, with a celestial smile, "pray believe that that favor will be useful to the glory of His Church. My presence of mind is necessary to carry out a thought suggested by God, whereas Napoléon had accomplished his whole destiny."

The two physicians stared at each other in amazement, when they heard her utter those words as easily as if she were in her own salon.

"Ah! there is the doctor who will cure me," she said, as she saw the archbishop enter.

She put forth all her strength to sit up in bed, to bow graciously to Monsieur Bianchon and beg him to accept something besides money for the good news he had given her; she whispered a few words to her mother, who led the doctor away; then she asked the archbishop to excuse her until the curé should come, and manifested a desire to take a little rest. Aline sat up with her mistress. At midnight, Madame Graslin woke and asked for the archbishop and the curé, and her maid pointed to them where they knelt praying for her. She made a sign to her mother and the servant to leave the room, and at a second sign the two priests came to her pillow.

"Monseigneur, and you, monsieur le curé, I have nothing to tell that you do not know. You were the first, monseigneur, to cast your eye into my conscience, you read my whole past there, and what you saw was enough for you. My confessor, this

angel whom God placed by my side, knows something more: I have confessed everything to him. I wish to consult you, whose minds are illumined by the spirit of the Church, as to the manner in which, as a true Christian, I should leave this earth. Do you think, austere and holy men that you are, that, if Heaven deigns to forgive the most perfect, the most profound repentance that ever stirred a human soul, do you think that I have fulfilled all my duties here on earth?"

"Yes," said the archbishop, "yes, my daughter."

"No, father, no," she said, raising herself to a sitting posture, while her eyes gleamed brightly. "A few steps from here there is a grave in which lies the body of an unfortunate man who bears the weight of a horrible crime; in this sumptuous abode there is a woman crowned with a high reputation for benevolence and virtue. People bless that woman; that poor young man is cursed! The criminal is crushed with general reprobation, I enjoy general esteem; I am mainly responsible for the crime, he is largely responsible for the well-doing which has earned for me so much renown and gratitude; culprit that I am, I have the credit; he, a martyr to his silence, is covered with shame! I shall die in a few hours, knowing that a whole canton weeps for me, that a whole department extols my benefactions, my piety, my virtues; whereas he died amid insults, before the eyes of a whole population that thronged to the spot impelled by detestation of murderers! You, my judges, are indulgent; but I hear a voice

within me, an imperious voice that leaves me no rest. Ah! God's hand, less gentle than yours, has smitten me from day to day, as if to warn me that my atonement was not complete. My faults can be redeemed only by a public confession. He is happy! Culpable, he gave up his life with ignominy in the face of Heaven and earth. And I, I am still deceiving society as I deceived the laws of mankind. I have not received one word of homage that has not been an insult to me, not a word of praise that has not burned my heart. Do you not see, in the coming of the procureur-général, a command from Heaven in accord with the voice that cries out to me: 'Confess!' "

The two priests, the prince of the Church and the humble curé, those two great lights, kept their eyes on the ground and did not speak. Too deeply moved by the grandeur and the resignation of the culprit, the judges were unable to pronounce sentence.

"My child," said the archbishop, after a time, raising his fine head, wasted by the austere habits of his devout life, "you go beyond the commandments of the Church. It is the Church's glory to make its dogmas harmonize with the manners of every epoch, for the Church is destined to traverse centuries of centuries in company with mankind. Secret confession has, according to its decisions, taken the place of public confession. That substitution makes the new law. The suffering you have endured is sufficient. Die in peace: God has heard you."

"But is not the wish of the criminal in conformity with the laws of the early Church, which enriched Heaven with as many saints and martyrs and confessors as there are stars in the sky?" rejoined Véronique, vehemently. "Who wrote: '*Confess ye one to another*'? was it not our Saviour's immediate disciples? Let me confess my shame publicly, on my knees. In that way I shall set right my offences against the whole world, against a family outlawed and almost exterminated by my fault. The world must know that my benefactions are not an offering, but a debt that I am paying. Suppose that, after I am dead, some disclosure tears away the lying veil that covers me?—Ah! that thought hastens the final hour."

"I see selfish thoughts in this, my child," said the archbishop, gravely. "Very strong passions are still alive in you; the passion that I thought extinct is—"

"Oh! I swear to you, monseigneur," she said, interrupting the prelate and gazing at him with eyes that were paralyzed with horror, "my heart is as purified as that of a guilty and repentant woman can be: there is no longer anything in my whole being save the thought of God."

"Monseigneur, let us allow divine justice to take its course," said the curé, in a voice broken with emotion. "For four years I have been struggling with this idea, it has been the subject of the only disputes that have arisen between my penitent and myself. My eyes have looked into the very bottom

of that heart, the earth has no further claim there. If the tears, the groans, the contrition of fifteen years have dwelt upon a fault shared by two beings, do not think that there has been the slightest trace of carnal feeling in that long and terrible remorse. Memory long since ceased to mingle its flames with those of the most fervent penitence. Yes, such floods of tears have extinguished that fire, fierce as it was. I answer," he said, extending his hand over Madame Graslin's head, and showing his own eyes filled with tears, "I answer for the purity of this archangelic soul. Moreover, I see in this desire a purpose to make reparation to an absent family, which is represented here to-day, by one of those coincidences in which God's providence makes itself manifest."

Véronique took the curé's trembling hand and kissed it.

"You have very often been harsh to me, dear pastor, but at this moment I see where your apostolic gentleness was stored away!—Do you," she said, looking at the archbishop, "do you, the supreme head of this corner of God's kingdom, be my staff in this hour of ignominy. I shall kneel the lowest of women; you will raise me, forgiven and, it may be, the equal of those who have never fallen."

The archbishop remained silent, evidently weighing all the arguments that his eagle eye discerned.

"Monseigneur," said the curé, "the religion has received some heavy blows. Will not this return to the ancient customs, necessitated by the magnitude

of the sin and the repentance, be a triumph which will redound to our credit?"

"They will say that we are fanatics! they will say that we demanded that this cruel scene should be enacted!"

And the archbishop resumed his meditation.

At that moment, Horace Bianchon and Roubaud returned to the room after knocking at the door. When the door opened, Véronique saw her mother, her son, and the whole household praying. The curés from two neighboring parishes had come to assist Monsieur Bonnet, and perhaps also to salute the great prelate, whom the French clergy unanimously supported for the cardinalate, hoping that the light of his essentially Gallican intellect would illumine the Holy College. Horace Bianchon was about to start for Paris; he came to bid the dying woman adieu, and to thank her for her munificence. He entered the room slowly, divining from the attitude of the two priests that they were deliberating concerning the method of treating the disease of the heart which had caused that of the body. He took Véronique's hand, placed it on the bed, and felt her pulse. The scene was made doubly solemn by the most profound stillness, the stillness of a summer night in the country. The great salon, the folding-doors of which were left open, was lighted for the benefit of the small gathering of people who were praying there, all on their knees, except the two priests, who were sitting and reading their breviaries. Beside the magnificent state bed were the

prelate, in his violet robes, the curé, and the two men of science.

"She is excited even in death!" said Horace Bianchon, who, like all men of great talent, often uttered words that were as grand as the spectacles he witnessed.

The archbishop rose, as if impelled by an inward impulse; he called Monsieur Bonnet and walked toward the door; they passed through the chamber and the salon and went out on the terrace, where they walked back and forth for some moments. When they returned, after discussing this case of ecclesiastical discipline, Roubaud came to meet them.

"Monsieur Bianchon sends me to bid you make haste; Madame Graslin is dying in a state of excitement not due to the excessive suffering caused by the disease."

The archbishop quickened his pace, and said, as he entered the room, to Madame Graslin, who looked anxiously into his face:

"You shall be gratified!"

Bianchon still had his hand on the patient's wrist; he uttered an exclamation of surprise and glanced at Roubaud and the two priests.

"Monseigneur, this body is no longer in our domain: your words have restored life where death had entered. You would make one believe in miracles!"

"For a long time madame has been all soul!" said Roubaud, and Véronique thanked him with a glance.

At that moment, a smile, in which was depicted the happiness caused by the thought of a complete atonement, restored to her face the innocent expression it had worn at eighteen years. All the painful emotions inscribed in the deep wrinkles, the leaden coloring, the livid marks, all the details that made her face beautiful with such a ghastly beauty when it expressed grief alone, in a word, the changes of every sort disappeared; it seemed to all who saw her that Véronique had worn a mask hitherto and that that mask had fallen. For the last time occurred this marvellous phenomenon whereby that woman's face expressed her life and her feelings. Everything in her was purified, illumined, and there was upon her features something like a reflection of the flaming swords of the guardian angels who surrounded her. Once more she was what she was when Limoges called her the *fair Madame Graslin*. The love of God made itself manifest, more powerful than guilty love had ever been: the latter formerly placed in relief all the forces of life, the other put aside all the weakness of death. A stifled cry was heard: La Sauviat appeared and rushed to the bedside, exclaiming:

"At last I see my child once more!"

The old woman's expression as she uttered those words, "*my child*," recalled so vividly the primitive innocence of children, that the spectators of that noble death turned their heads away to conceal their emotion. The illustrious physician took Madame Graslin's hand and kissed it, then went away. The

sound of his carriage wheels broke the profound silence, saying that there was no hope of preserving the soul of that country-side. The archbishop, the curé, the physician, all those who were conscious of fatigue, went to take a little rest when Madame Graslin herself fell asleep for a few hours. She awoke at dawn, asking that her windows might be opened. She wished to see the rising of her last sun.

At ten o'clock, the archbishop, clad in his pontifical robes, came to Madame Graslin's chamber. The prelate and Monsieur Bonnet had such absolute confidence in that woman, that they said nothing to her as to the limits within which she should confine her disclosures. Véronique noticed an assemblage of clergymen more numerous than the church of Montégnac could accommodate, for those from all the neighboring communes had come to the village. Monseigneur was to be assisted by four curés. The magnificent altar ornaments, presented by Madame Graslin to her beloved parish, gave great brilliancy to the ceremony. Eight choir boys, in their red and white costumes, were drawn up in two lines from the bed to the salon, each of them holding one of the enormous candlesticks of gilded bronze that Véronique had had sent from Paris. The cross and banner of the church were held by two white-haired sacristans on each side of the platform on which the bed stood. Thanks to the zeal of the servants of the château, the wooden altar, taken from the sacristy, was

placed beside the door of the salon, all decorated and prepared, so that monseigneur could say mass there. Madame Graslin was touched by these attentions, which the Church accords only to royalties.

The two wings of the door opening into the dining-room were thrown open, so that she could see the whole ground-floor of her château filled with a large part of the population of the village. Her friends had provided for everything, for the salon was occupied exclusively by the servants of her household. In front, grouped before the door of her bedroom, were her chosen friends and those persons upon whose discretion reliance could be placed. Messieurs Grossetête, De Granville, Roubaud, Gérard, Clousier, and Ruffin took their places in the first row. They were all to rise at the proper moment and remain standing to prevent the voice of the penitent being heard by any others than themselves. There was another circumstance, fortunate for the dying woman: her friends' sobs drowned her words.

In front of all the others were two persons who presented an imposing spectacle. The first was Denise Tascheron: her garments of quaker-like simplicity made her unrecognizable to those of the villagers who could see her; but to the other personage she was an acquaintance not easily forgotten, and her appearance was a terrifying gleam of light. The procureur-général caught a glimpse of the truth; he suddenly became aware of the rôle he had played with Madame Graslin in all its significance. Less

dominated than the others by the religious question, in his capacity of child of the nineteenth century, the magistrate was conscious of a pang of intense horror at his heart, for he was able then to comprehend the drama of Véronique's secret life at the hôtel Graslin during the Tascheron trial. That tragic epoch recurred to his memory, illumined by old La Sauviat's eyes, which, gleaming with hatred, fell upon him like two streams of molten lead; that old woman, standing within ten steps of him, forgave nothing. That man, the representative of human justice, shuddered. Pale, wounded to the heart, he dared not turn his eyes to the bed where the woman he had loved so well, lying livid under the hand of death, derived the strength to hold the death-agony at bay from the very magnitude of her sin; and Véronique's emaciated profile, standing sharply out against the red damask, gave him the vertigo. At eleven o'clock the mass began. When the epistle had been read by the curé of Vizay, the archbishop laid aside his dalmatic and took his stand in the doorway.

"Christians, gathered together here to witness the ceremony of extreme unction which we are about to confer upon the mistress of this house," he said; "you who add your prayers to those of the Church, to intercede for her with God, and to obtain her everlasting salvation, are now informed that she does not deem herself worthy, at this supreme hour, to receive the blessed viaticum until she has made, for the edification of her neighbor, public confession

of the greatest of her sins. We have resisted her pious wish, although that act of contrition was long customary in the early days of Christianity; but as this poor woman has told us that the rehabilitation of an unhappy child of this parish is involved herein, we leave her at liberty to follow the inspiration of her repentance."

Having uttered these words with fervent pastoral dignity, the archbishop turned to give place to Véronique. The dying woman appeared, supported by her aged mother and the curé, two grand and venerable images: did she not owe her body to her earthly mother and her soul to her spiritual mother, the Church? She knelt upon a cushion, clasped her hands, and was silent for a few moments, as if collecting strength to speak from some spring supplied by Heaven. At that moment there was something indefinably terrifying in the silence. No one dared to glance at his neighbor. All eyes were cast down. But Véronique's eyes, when she raised them, met those of the procureur-général, and the expression upon that face, now perfectly white, made her blush.

"I could not die in peace," said Véronique, in a trembling voice, "if I should leave behind me the false image of myself which each one of you who listen to me may have formed. You see in me a great criminal, who commends herself to your prayers, and who seeks to make herself worthy of forgiveness by the public confession of her sin. That sin was so grave, it had such fatal results, that no penance, perhaps, will atone for it. But

the more humiliations I undergo upon this earth, the less reason I shall have to dread the divine wrath in the heavenly kingdom to which I aspire. My father, who had such perfect confidence in me, commended to my favor, nearly twenty years ago, a child of this parish, in whom he had discovered a desire to behave well, an aptitude for study, and many excellent qualities. That child was the unfortunate Jean-François Tascheron, who became attached to me as his benefactress. How did the affection I bore him become guilty? that is something which I think I may be excused from explaining. Perhaps you would see the purest sentiments that guide our actions here on earth insensibly turned aside from their natural bent by extraordinary sacrifices, by reasons due to our weakness, by a multitude of causes which might seem to lessen the magnitude of my sin. Even if the noblest sentiments were my accomplices, am I the less guilty for that? I prefer to admit that I, who by reason of my education and my rank in society might deem myself superior to the child whom my father entrusted to me, and from whom I was separated by the delicacy natural to our sex, that I, to my undoing, listened to the voice of the demon. I soon found myself far too much that young man's mother, to be insensible to his silent, unobtrusive admiration. He was the first to appreciate me at my true worth. Perhaps I was myself led astray by arguments horrible to think of: I thought how discreet a young man who owed everything to me would surely be, a young man, too,

whom chance had placed so far beneath me, although we were equals in point of birth. In a word, I found in my reputation for benevolence and my pious occupations a cloak to shelter my conduct. Alas!—and that was unquestionably one of my greatest sins—I concealed my passion in the shadow of the altar. The most virtuous actions, the love I bear my mother, acts of genuine and sincere piety amid so much straying from the straight path—I made them all serve the miserable triumph of an insane passion, and they were so many bonds that held me fast. My poor, adored mother, who hears me now, was for a long time an unwitting, innocent accomplice of my wrong-doing. When she opened her eyes, too many dangerous steps had been taken for her not to seek in her mother-heart strength to keep silent. Thus, in her case, silence became the most exalted of virtues. Her love for her daughter triumphed over her love for God. Ah! I solemnly relieve her from the heavy burden she has borne. She will end her days without a lie in her eyes or on her brow. May her mother-love be free from reproach, may her noble and sanctified old age, crowned with virtues, shine with all its splendor, and be relieved from the link by which she has been indirectly connected with so much infamy!"

At this point, tears choked Véronique's voice for a moment; Aline gave her salts to smell.

"Not anyone, even the devoted servant who renders me this last service, has failed to be kinder to me than I deserve, and to pretend, at least, not to

know what she knew; but she has been in the secret of the austerities by which I have subdued this flesh, which was weak. Therefore I ask pardon of society for having deceived it, impelled as I was by the terrible logic of society. Jean-François Tascheron was not so guilty as society believed. Ah! I implore all you who hear me to consider his youth and a passion inflamed no less by the remorse that seized me, than by involuntary fascinations. More than that! It was uprightness, but uprightness ill applied, that caused the greatest of all our misfortunes. We could neither of us endure that constant deception. He appealed from it, poor fellow, to my own pride, and sought to render that fatal love as little injurious as possible to another. Thus I was the cause of his crime. Impelled by necessity, the unhappy man, guilty of too great devotion to an idol, selected among all possible reprehensible acts that one of which the consequences were irreparable. I knew nothing of it until the moment that it happened. In its execution, the hand of God overthrew that whole scaffolding of false calculations. I returned home, having heard shrieks that still echo in my ears, having divined a murderous struggle which it was not in my power to prevent—I, the cause of that madness. Tascheron had gone mad, I swear to you."

At that point, Véronique looked at the procureur-général, and a profound sigh issued from Denise's breast.

"His reason left him when he saw what he believed to be his happiness destroyed by unforeseen

circumstances. The unhappy youth, led astray by his heart, marched on from a fault to a crime, and from a crime to a double murder. It is certain that he left my mother's house an innocent man, he returned there guilty. I alone in all the world knew that there was no premeditation nor any of the aggravating circumstances which led to his death-sentence. A hundred times I started to give myself up to save him, and a hundred times a ghastly heroism, necessary and masterful, caused the words to die upon my lips. It may be that my presence within a few steps contributed to inspire in him the hateful, the infamous, the ignoble courage of assassins. Had he been alone he would have fled. I had shaped that soul, trained that mind, filled that heart; I knew him, he was incapable of cowardice or baseness. Do justice to that innocent arm, do justice to him whom God in His clemency allows to sleep in peace in the grave you have watered with your tears, divining the truth, I doubt not! Punish, curse the culprit who is here before you! Dismayed by the crime when it had been committed, I did everything to conceal it. I had been charged by my father, I who had no children, to lead one of them to God; I led him to the scaffold. Ah! pour out all your reproaches upon me, crush me, now is the time!"

As she spoke, her eyes gleamed with savage pride. The archbishop, standing behind her and protecting her with his pastoral cross, laid aside his impassive attitude and covered his eyes with his right hand. A muffled shriek was heard, as if someone were

dying. Gérard and Roubaud caught Denise Tascheron in their arms, as she fell in a swoon, and carried her from the room. That spectacle partially extinguished the fire in Véronique's eyes; she was disturbed, but her martyr's serenity soon reappeared.

"You know now," she continued, "that I deserve neither praise nor benedictions for my conduct here. To obtain admission into Heaven, I have led a secret life of agonizing penances which Heaven will estimate at what they are worth! My outward life has been one great reparation for the evil I have caused. I have written my repentance in ineffaceable lines upon this estate; it will endure almost forever. It is written in the fertilized fields, in the greater size of the village, in the streams guided from the mountains to this plain, formerly wild and untilled, now green and fruitful. Not a tree will be cut here for a hundred years to come that the people will not remember the remorse to which they owe its shade! Thus this repentant soul, which would have animated a long life, beneficial to this canton, will long breathe among you. All that you would have owed to his talents, to a fortune worthily acquired, has been performed by the heir of his repentance, by her who caused his crime. Everything that concerns society has been atoned for; I alone bear the burden of that life, cut off in its flower, which had been entrusted to me and for which I am to be held responsible!"

Again tears dimmed the flame of her glance. She paused.

"There is a man among you, who, because he did his duty strictly, has been to me the object of a detestation which I believed to be undying," she resumed. "He was the first instrument of my punishment. I was too near the deed, my feet were too deep in blood for me not to hate the law. So long as that seed of wrath flourished in my heart, I realized that there was a remnant of blameworthy passion there; I had nothing to forgive, I simply purged that corner where the Evil One was hiding. Painful as the victory has been, it is complete."

The procureur-général showed Véronique a face wet with tears. Human justice seemed to be suffering from remorse. When the penitent turned her head in order to continue, she met the tear-bedewed face of an old man, Grossetête, who put out his hands imploringly, as if to say: "Enough!" At that moment, that sublime creature heard such a concert of weeping, and was so moved by such an outpouring of sympathy, that she could not endure the balm of that general pardon, but was seized with an attack of faintness; seeing that the source of her strength had failed her, her old mother recovered her youthful strength once more to carry her to the bed.

"Christians," said the archbishop, "you have heard this penitent's confession; she confirms the sentence of the law, and her words may set at rest the scruples or the anxiety of its officers. You must have found herein fresh motives for adding your prayers to those of the Church, which offers to God

the blessed sacrifice of the mass in order to implore His pity in favor of such a signal repentance."

The service was resumed; Véronique followed it with an expression which denoted such inward satisfaction, that she seemed to all eyes to be a different woman. There was an innocent look upon her face, worthy of the pure and ingenuous maiden she had been in the old paternal home. The dawn of eternity was already whitening her forehead and gilding her face with celestial tints. Doubtless she heard bursts of mystic melody, and gathered strength to live from her longing to be united to God at last; the curé Bonnet came to the bedside and gave her absolution; the archbishop administered the consecrated oil with a paternal affection that revealed to all those present how dear to his heart was that wandering lamb now returned to the fold. With blessed ointment the priest closed to the things of this earth those eyes that had done so much harm, and placed the seal of the Church on the too eloquent lips. The ears, through which evil suggestions had found their way, were closed forever. All the senses, benumbed by penance, were thus sanctified, and the spirit of evil was left without power over that soul. Never did spectators more fully understand the grandeur and solemnity of a sacrament than those who saw the labors of the Church justified by that dying woman's confession. Thus prepared, Véronique received the body of Jesus Christ with an expression of hope and joy which melted the ice of incredulity which had so

often baffled the curé: Roubaud, abashed, became a Catholic in a moment! That spectacle was at once touching and awful; but it was made so solemn by virtue of the arrangement of the accessories that the painter's art might have found there a subject for a genuine masterpiece.

When, after that sorrowful episode, the dying woman heard the words of the Gospel of Saint John commenced, she motioned to her mother to bring her son, who had been led into the room by his tutor. When she saw Francis kneeling on the platform, the pardoned mother thought that she was entitled to place her hands upon his head to bless him; then she breathed her last. Old La Sauviat was there, at her post, as for twenty years past. That woman, heroic in her way, closed the eyes of her daughter, who had suffered so, and kissed them one after the other. All the priests, followed by the clergy, surrounded the bed. By the bright light of the tapers, they intoned the awe-inspiring *De Profundis*, the strains of which informed the people kneeling in front of the château, the friends who were praying in the various rooms, and all the servants, that the mother of that canton was no more. The chant was accompanied by universal lamentations and weeping. That noble woman's confession had not been heard beyond the doorway of the salon, and had had only friendly ears for auditors. When the peasants from the neighborhood, mingled with those of Montégnac, came, praying and weeping, one by one, to bid their benefactress a last adieu, with a

green branch, they saw an officer of the law overwhelmed with grief, holding the cold hand of the woman whom he had so unwittingly, but so justly, wounded.

Two days later, the procureur-général, Grossetête, the archbishop, and the mayor, holding the four corners of the pall, escorted Madame Graslin's body to its last resting-place. It was laid in the grave amid a profound silence. Not a word was spoken, no one had strength to speak, every eye was filled with tears. "She is a saint!" was a remark made on all sides as they went away along the roads built by her in the canton she had enriched—a remark made to her creations as if to give them life. No one thought it strange that Madame Graslin should be buried beside the body of Jean-François Tascheron; she did not ask it; but the old mother, with a remnant of loving pity, had requested the sacristan to place together those whom earth had so violently separated, and who were united, by repentance for the same sin, in purgatory.

Madame Graslin's will realized all anticipations concerning it. She endowed scholarships at the College of Limoges, and beds at the hospital, for the benefit of workingmen alone; she set aside a considerable sum, three hundred thousand francs in six years, for the purchase of that part of the village called Les Tascherons, where she provided that a hospital should be built. That hospital, for the indigent old people of the canton, for the sick, for women in want at the time of their confinement, and for foundlings, was to

be called the hospital of Les Tascherons; Véronique wished it to be carried on by the Gray Sisters, and fixed the salaries of the physician and the surgeon at four thousand francs. She requested Roubaud to be the first physician of the institution, entrusting him to select the surgeon and to superintend the carrying out of her plan, conjointly with Gérard, who was to be the architect. She gave, in addition, to the commune of Montégnac, an amount of tillage land sufficient to pay its taxes to the State. The Church, endowed with a relief fund, to be used in certain exceptional cases, was to exercise oversight over young men, and to be on the watch for natives of Montégnac who manifested an inclination for the arts, sciences, or manufacturing. The judicious benevolence of the testatrix provided what sum was to be taken from that fund to encourage such inclinations.

The news of her death, which was everywhere received as a calamity, was accompanied by no insinuations insulting to her memory. That reserve was an act of homage rendered to such eminent virtue by that hard-working Catholic people, who are beginning anew in that corner of France the miracles of the *Edifying Letters*.

Gérard, appointed guardian of Francis Graslin, and required by the will to live at the château, took up his abode there, but not until three months after Véronique's death did he marry Denise Tascheron, in whom Francis found a second mother.

Paris, January 1837—March 1845.

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